

# AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 24

**PLUS**

**UNITED ARAB  
EMIRATES**

AFC Asian Cup hosts  
focus on the future  
and developing into  
a continental giant

**FIFA World Cup  
Russia 2018  
Review**

**NEIL  
ETHERIDGE**

Goalkeeper has finally arrived on the  
biggest stage with the Philippines

ISSUE  
**24**

October 2018



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Decorated former Al Ittihad defender recalls the Jeddah club's historic 2005 AFC Champions League victory.



**HAJIME MORIYASU**

Japan's new head coach outlines his plans for the future as the Samurai Blue prepare for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.



**WANG SHUANG**

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**Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa**  
AFC President



Dear friends,

Recently we passed the '100 days to go' milestone as we count down to the biggest and best-ever AFC Asian Cup which will begin in Abu Dhabi on January 5, 2019.

On that evening hosts the United Arab Emirates will take on Bahrain at the Zayed Sports Stadium to kick off the biggest and richest ever tournament.

Asian football continues to make enormous strides with the expansion to 24 teams, which means every one of the AFC's five zones is represented, and a prize fund of almost US\$15m.

There will be a new trophy, a new match ball and record numbers of football lovers engaged through television and social media. Our slogan talks of 'Bringing Asia Together' – and there is no doubt that this competition will do that.

We must thank the Higher Local Organising Committee who have worked tremendously hard to deliver a great ticket sales campaign, attract thousands of local volunteers as well as providing the perfect stage for Asia's top players and teams.

There is no doubt that the tournament will capture the imagination of not only the continent but also beyond as the world focuses on our pinnacle national team competition.

Currently, our top club competitions – with their increased prize money – are also coming to an exciting conclusion – none more so than in the AFC Champions League where Kashima Antlers and Suwon Samsung Bluewings meet in the East Zone's semi-final to face either Persepolis or Al Sadd from the West.

The quarter-finals produced some outstanding football and great drama as Persepolis came from behind to defeat Al Duhail, while Suwon clung on to win in extra time against a determined Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, the 2016 Champions.

And in the AFC Cup, Air Force Club of Iraq still have the opportunity of not only winning their third successive title but also of hosting the final in their own country. This has again been a year in which the standard of football has grown to new heights.

Finally, I must congratulate Japan for their historic first success in the FIFA Women's U-20 World Cup when they beat Spain in the final held in France. Japan, of course, were the most successful of Asia's record five teams at the FIFA World Cup in Russia – coming so close to beating Belgium in the round of 16.

Special praise must also be extended to Alireza Faghani, from the Islamic Republic of Iran, who officiated, along with his compatriots Reza Sokhandan and Mohammad Mansouri, the third and fourth placed game between Belgium and England.

It continues to be an exciting time for the Asian game.

**Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa**  
AFC President



*At the heart of the image*



# Gallery

## Team Talk

Tianjin Quanjian head coach Paulo Sousa motivates his team ahead of their AFC Champions League quarter-final first leg defeat to Kashima Antlers in August.



# Gallery



## Turkmen Triumph

Altyn Asyr players celebrate opening the scoring away at India's JSW Bengaluru in the first leg of the AFC Cup Inter-Zone semi-final in August. The Turkmen side eventually advanced 5-2 on aggregate.



# Gallery



## Cloud Nine

Al Duhail's Almo'ez Ali reels off in celebration after his goal against Persepolis in the first leg of the AFC Champions League quarter-final in August secured the Qatari side a record-equaling ninth successive victory on the continent.



# Gallery



## Iranian Joy

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Mes Sungun Varzaghan won the AFC Futsal Club Championship for the first time after defeating Vietnam's Thai Son Nam 4-2 in August's final in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.





# Japan Win First FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup

THE YOUNG NADESHIKO DEFEATED SPAIN 3-1 IN AUGUST'S FINAL IN FRANCE TO COMPLETE A MEMORABLE TOURNAMENT AND ENSURE THE TROPHY REMAINED IN EAST ASIA AFTER DPR KOREA WON THE 2016 EDITION.

**H**inata Miyazawa, Saori Takarada and Fuka Nagano each scored as Japan claimed a 3-1 victory over Spain in the final in Vannes as the East Asians were crowned FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup champions for the first time in August. After withstanding early Spanish pressure, Miyazawa gave Japan the lead shortly before half-time before Takarada doubled their advantage as the hour approached. Nagano all but wrapped up the game midway through the second half, although Candela Andujar gave Spain hope with 19 minutes remaining. But Futoshi Ikeda's side held out to ensure Japan became the first country to win the Women's World Cups at senior, U-20 and U-17 levels.

"We were able to win; I am really happy. It was a long time coming," said Japan's 19-year-old captain Moeka Minami, whose side had earlier lost 1-0 to Spain in the group stage. "We made many mistakes in the last match against Spain, but today I think that we had fewer minor mistakes. The moment I lifted the cup was the happiest time of my life." Japan, defending champions DPR Korea and China were the three nations representing Asia. Ikeda's team began with a 1-0 win over the United States in Group C but defeat to Spain meant the group went down to the wire. Hat-tricks from Takarada and Riko Ueki, however, secured a 6-0 win over Paraguay and a place in the quarter-finals. Holders DPR Korea lost 3-1 to England in their Group B opener but went on to claim

back-to-back victories over Mexico and Brazil – both courtesy of late goals – and a place in the last eight. China, who defeated Haiti but lost to Germany, fell at the first hurdle after an own goal against Nigeria saw the game end 1-1 as the West Africans pipped the East Asians to second place in Group D. DPR Korea were ousted 1-0 by hosts France in the quarter-finals in a repeat of the 2016 final, but Japan beat three-time winners Germany 3-1 after second-half goals from Jun Endo, Ueki and Takarada helped set up a clash with England. The Young Nadeshiko claimed a place in their first final when Ueki and Endo scored within five minutes of each other in the first half as Japan ran out 2-0 winners, before the victory over Spain proved their crowning glory.



# Korea Republic And Japan Claim Asian Games Glory

THERE WAS SUCCESS FOR EAST ASIA AT THE 2018 ASIAN GAMES IN INDONESIA AS KOREA REPUBLIC DEFEATED JAPAN TO WIN THE MEN'S FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT WHILE JAPAN BEAT CHINA TO LIFT THE WOMEN'S TITLE.

**L**ee Seung-woo and Hwang Hee-chan scored extra-time goals as Korea Republic defeated Japan 2-1 to win the 2018 Asian Games men's football tournament gold medal and retain their title in Cibanong, Indonesia, in early September. Kim Hak-bum's Korea Republic stormed to a 6-0 victory over Bahrain in their Group E opener, but suffered a surprise 2-1 defeat to Malaysia on Matchday Two. Son Heung-min scored the only goal of the game as qualification to the knockout rounds was confirmed after a 1-0 win against Kyrgyz Republic, before Islamic Republic of Iran were ousted 2-0 in the Round of 16. Up against Uzbekistan in the last 16, Hwang Ui-jo scored a hat-trick but the 3-3 scoreline

saw the game go to extra-time. Hwang Hee-chan would be the hero, scoring from the penalty spot with two minutes to play as the East Asians won 4-3. There was no such drama in the semi-finals with a 3-1 victory over Vietnam setting up a date with Japan, who defeated the United Arab Emirates 1-0 in the other last-four encounter. The UAE took bronze after beating Vietnam on penalties following a 1-1 draw, but the tournament belonged to Korea Republic who lifted a record fifth title. In the women's tournament, Yuika Sugawara headed home in the last minute as Japan secured a dramatic 1-0 victory over China in August's final. Drawn with Vietnam and Thailand, Japan claimed wins over the Southeast Asian duo to advance to the quarter-finals.

DPR Korea, who had defeated Japan in the 2014 final, awaited in the last eight and the Nadeshiko would get their revenge as Yui Hasegawa scored the decisive goal in the 2-1 victory that eliminated the holders. Another tight match followed in the semi-finals as Sugawara's early goal against Korea Republic was cancelled out by Lee Min-a, before an own goal by Lim Seon-joo in the last five minutes sealed Japan's passage to their third successive final. China defeated Chinese Taipei 1-0 in the second semi-final as they advanced after scoring 31 goals and conceding none, but they fell at the very last following Sugawara's late winner. Korea Republic, meanwhile, took bronze after seeing off Chinese Taipei 4-0.





## Mes Sungun Seal Maiden AFC Futsal Club Championship

MES SUNGUN VARZAGHAN OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN WON THE AFC FUTSAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP FOR THE FIRST TIME FOLLOWING A 4-2 VICTORY OVER VIETNAM'S THAI SON NAM IN AUGUST'S FINAL IN YOGYAKARTA.

Farhad Fakhim bagged a brace as Mes Sungun Varzaghan won the AFC Futsal Club Championship on their maiden appearance after seeing off Vietnam's Thai Son Nam 4-2 in the final in August.

The Iranian side fell behind in Yogyakarta after Pham Duc Hoa's early goal but levelled through Hossein Tayebi's stunning back-heel, before captain Fakhim tapped home his first of the game.

Tran Van Vu's deflected effort found its way into the back of the net shortly before half-time as the sides went in all square, but Fakhim's fine solo effort put Mes Sungun back in front early in the second half and Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh then rounded off the scoring from the spot with a minute to play.

"This was a very tough match and both

teams showed that they have the right to be champions," said Mes Sungun coach Hamid Bigham Tabrizi.

"We did our best, played our game and did exactly what we wanted to do. Our next focus is to win the league and of course to defend our title next year."

After winning their maiden Iranian Futsal Super League earlier in the year, Mes Sungun advanced to the continental competition for the first time and had few problems in the group stage.

Tayebi netted a hat-trick in a 9-2 opening-day victory over Tajikistan's FC Sipar, before he added a further four to his tally as his side again scored nine in seeing off Uzbekistan's AGMK FC 9-1.

With top spot in Group D still up for grabs, the Tabriz team defeated Lebanon's Bank of Beirut 3-1 to progress to the last eight as

table-toppers.

The goals flowed again in the quarter-finals as Kyrgyz Republic's FC Erem were seen off 8-3, but Mes Sungun then faced their toughest test to date in the semi-final clash against Iraqi powerhouse Nafit Al Wasat.

Hassanzadeh put the Iranian side 2-1 up in the second half before Fakhim gave them a two-goal cushion with three minutes to play.

But Nafit pulled one back almost immediately after to ensure a nervy finish as Mes Sungun eventually held out.

Bank of Beirut took third place after defeating Nafit 5-3 in the third place play-off in a game that saw the tournament's 12-goal top scorer Mahdi Javid net a hat-trick before also picking up the Most Valuable Player award.



## Japan Clinch Third AFC U-16 Championship Crown

A 1-0 VICTORY OVER TAJIKISTAN IN OCTOBER SECURED A RECORD THIRD AFC U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP FOR JAPAN, WHO ADDED TO THE TITLES THEY WON IN 1994 AND 2006 TO BECOME THE ONLY NATION TO LIFT THE TROPHY THREE TIMES.

Jun Nishikawa struck the only goal of the game as Japan claimed a hard-fought 1-0 win over Tajikistan at Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur in early October to seal AFC U-16 Championship Malaysia 2018 glory.

After playing out a scoreless draw in the group stage, there was again nothing to separate the sides in the first half of the final as Tajikistan looked to cap a remarkable tournament with their first title.

But it was to be Japan who eventually came out on top as Nishikawa finished into the bottom corner after being picked put by substitute Keita Nakano in the 63rd minute to break Tajikistan's brave resistance.

With the tournament's top four teams also qualifying for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Peru

2019, the two finalists, along with Australia and Korea Republic, booked their tickets to South America.

"My expectations before the tournament were that it was going to be a difficult competition, and that our players had to improve game by game," said Japan coach Yoshiro Moriyama.

"And they did well to grow and improve throughout the tournament. We overcame whatever difficulties were thrown at us and got the trophy.

"Tajikistan is one of the most improved teams in the tournament. When we first met in the group stage, we struggled to find the back of the net because they had such a good defence.

"But since then they've improved offensively as well. In the end, the two most improved teams met in the final."

Having exited to eventual winners Iraq in the 2016 semi-finals, Japan had earlier defeated Australia in the last four to progress to a first final since 2012.

And appearing in their fourth final, the East Asians ended their 12-year wait for the trophy with their fifth win in six games.

Despite defeat, Tajikistan will be delighted with their performance after they bounced back from a 6-2 opening-day loss to hosts Malaysia.

After beating Thailand in their final group game, the Central Asians ousted 2014 champions DPR Korea and two-time winners Korea Republic on penalties to better their third-place finish in 2006.

"I am very proud of my players. After our first loss to Malaysia, our boys completed a spectacular turnaround to reach the final," said Tajikistan coach Zayniddin Rakhimov.



# RECORD POINTS HAUL FOR ASIA

THE FIVE ASIAN TEAMS CONCLUDED THEIR TIME AT THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP WITH THE HIGHEST POINTS TALLY IN THE CONTINENT'S HISTORY. WE ANALYSE THE PERFORMANCES AND RELIVE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS, AHEAD OF THE NEXT CHALLENGE FOR ASIA'S TOP TEAMS: THE 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP

Heroic individual and team performances, famous victories and record-breaking moments were all present in Russia 2018 as Japan, Korea Republic, Australia, Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia represented Asia on the world stage.

Japan's campaign proved to be the highlight, as they emulated their success of 2002 and 2010 in reaching the Round of 16 – the only side from the continent to do so at Russia 2018 – before bowing out bravely to

eventual third-placed side Belgium.

In their opening game, Japan faced arguably their toughest Group H opponents in the form of South American side Colombia, who they had lost 4-1 to in Brazil.

An early red card for Carlos Sanchez and a penalty converted by Shinji Kagawa provided the perfect start for the Samurai Blue, but they had to battle back from seeing their lead snuffed out by Juan Quintero. A Yuya Osako winner in the second half duly provided a modicum of revenge for Brazil 2014.

A rollercoaster 2-2 draw with Senegal followed, before a slim 1-0 defeat to Poland







proved enough to edge Japan through as Group H runners-up and set up a clash with Belgium in the last 16.

Against the much-fancied Europeans, Japan saved their best performance for last and dramatically took the lead through Genki Haraguchi before doubling the advantage in stunning fashion through Takashi Inui.

The fairytale was not to last, though, as Belgium fought back to find three goals in the final 25 minutes and eliminate the brave Samurai Blue.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the performance of Akira Nishino's men was seen positively back home.

"The tournament went very well for Japan," says veteran Japanese journalist and author Etsuko Motokawa.

"The new players were able show their great ability because veterans such as [Makoto] Hasebe and [Keisuke] Honda. Gaku Shibasaki, Gen Shoji, and Takashi Inui played so well.

"Shibasaki proved that he can play at this level, Shoji showed he can completely shut down an opponent, while Inui scored twice and was important throughout.

"Each game had a different player scoring a goal; it was like having a "hero of the day" for each match."

Japan's regional rivals Korea Republic were unable to reach the knockout stage as

they had done in 2002 and 2010 but few would disagree that they pulled off the shock of the tournament by eliminating defending champions Germany.

Coach Shin Tae-yong oversaw a mixed series of results in the build-up to Russia 2018, with various formations, playing styles and players utilised, an inconsistency that showed in a disappointing 1-0 defeat to Sweden in their Group F opener.

Another underwhelming performance followed against Mexico, albeit one which included a stunning consolation goal from Son Heung-min, and saw Korea Republic entering their final group game at the World Cup on the brink of bowing out without a point.

The 2014 champions Germany needed a convincing win to secure their own place in the knockout stage but came up against a superb rearguard action by the Koreans, with goalkeeper Cho Hyeon-woo in particular shining.

Denied time-and-time again by the stalwart Korean backline, Germany threw caution to the wind and were caught out at the back as both Kim Young-gwon and Son scored in injury time to record a famous victory for both Korea Republic and Asia.

"I think the Korean team restored our pride with our biggest victory in the World Cup even though we didn't qualify for the Round

of 16," said Seo Ho-jung, a football journalist covering his third FIFA World Cup.

"We beat Germany, the best team in the world, and eliminated them from the group stage for the first time in 80 years.

"Before the World Cup, we had no idea that Cho Hyeon-woo could play at this level. He has shown his ability and value on the international stage through this World Cup; I think he will play in Europe in the future."

There may have been no famous victory for Iran in Russia but they did come within inches of advancing to the Round of 16 despite being drawn into the proverbial "Group of Death" alongside the last two European champions, Spain and Portugal, in addition to Morocco.

A dogged defensive display against a Morocco side that culminated in a dramatic late own goal from substitute Aziz Bouhaddouz got the ball rolling for Team Melli and with three points in the bag, Iran set out to further strengthen their position with a positive result against strong favourites Spain.

This time, Team Melli were the ones left disappointed as Diego Costa's deflected effort separated the sides at the final whistle.

Victory against Portugal was now a must, and Carlos Queiroz's men saved their best performance until last as Karim Ansarifard's late penalty cancelled out Ricardo

Quaresma's wonder strike.

For a second, Iran thought they had got the all-important victory as Mehdi Taremi was sent one-on-one with the Portuguese goalkeeper with just seconds to go on the clock, but his effort from close-range struck the side netting.

One point and one goal was all that separated Iran from progressing to the knockout stages for the first time in their history. Nonetheless, the four points collected marked their best-ever World Cup tally and the joint highest garnered by an Asian nation in Russia. Promising signs going into January's AFC Asian Cup.

"It was a very memorable World Cup for us, for Iranian football fans," said Pejman Rhabar, Editor-in-chief of one of Iran's leading sports websites.

"You saw how people went to the airport to welcome our national team. We haven't seen these sort of images before. I think most of the people who love football in Iran, liked the Iranian football team's performance. I think it's a good achievement for our national team.

"Our next step is improvement. Now we are very good in defence and we are a team the big teams like Portugal and Spain struggle to score against. But when we talk about the attacking system, we are not good. And now we have some time before the Asian Cup to improve and add some attacking systems to our team."

Top Left Australia lost 2-1 to France

Left Korea Republic eliminated Germany with a stunning 2-0 win

Above Iran drew 1-1 with Portugal

Bottom Left Saudi Arabia defeated Egypt 2-1

Saudi Arabia's own exploits were perhaps not as celebrated, but – like Korea Republic – they did sign off their Group A campaign with a win.

With the eyes of the world focused on them, Saudi Arabia were eager to start with a positive performance against Russia, but instead, they produced their worst World Cup display since losing 8-0 to Germany in 2002.

After going into the half-time break two goals down, the Saudis conceded three more in the final 20 minutes to get off to the worst imaginable start with a 5-0 defeat.

With the earlier excitement and optimism giving way to arguably more realistic expectations against Uruguay, the Green Falcons put in a courageous performance against the two-time world champions. Saudi Arabia had the larger share of possession and created opportunities, but a solitary Luis Suarez goal consigned them to a second defeat, albeit by a narrow 1-0 margin.

By the time the third match against Egypt rolled around, elimination was already confirmed for both sides, but there were still bragging rights to play for between the two

neighbouring countries. Juan Antonio Pizzi's men turned on the style with a dominant outing as they came from behind to secure a 2-1 win courtesy of goals from Salman Al Faraj and Salem Al Dawsari.

"Mistakes in tactical and mental preparation for the opening match cost us dearly," said Saudi football journalist Atef Nahass, who has covered the Green Falcons since the 1984 AFC Asian Cup.

"But to be fair, credit to the players and staff who were able to restore balance and absorb the shock of the first defeat. We got an important win against Egypt. Overall, this campaign can be filed under "could have been better".

"Pizzi now has time until the 2019 Asian Cup to impress his style of play on the team. Finding a goalscorer will be a headache, but elsewhere there are plenty of options and I expect a very good campaign for Saudi Arabia in the UAE."

Somewhat surprisingly, it was Australia, Asia's current champions, who were the only side unable to secure a win in Russia and it's clear there will be much work needed to ensure they can successfully defend their title at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

A narrow opening round defeat to eventual winners France, when they may well have shared a point, was nothing to be sniffed at, but Australia would perhaps





Above  
Son Heung-min rounds off the scoring against Germany

have been disappointed to only draw with an unconvincing Denmark side in their following match.

The stalemate with the Scandinavians, added to the results in the other Group D fixtures, meant the Socceroos' destiny was out of their hands in the final tie against Peru, where even victory was potentially not enough should Denmark and France draw.

Notwithstanding the result between the Europeans (ultimately a goalless tie which would have eliminated Australia regardless), the continental champions saved their worst performance for last, going down 2-0 to the Peruvians in a disappointing conclusion to their 2018 World Cup campaign.

"Ultimately, Russia 2018 was a missed opportunity," said Sebastian Hassett, an Australian football journalist for the past 15 years.

"Bert van Marwijk's mission was to get Australia through to the knockout stages and they fell well short. Australia's largely defensive strategy was understandable, but the complete absence of any attacking nous was problematic in all three games. Daniel Arzani was clearly our brightest young player to emerge for many years.

"A new coach, Graham Arnold, has officially begun preparations for the AFC Asian Cup, which is now just a few months away. Australia will be out to defend the title but it looms as a real challenge."

Right  
Japan claim an impressive 2-1 victory over Colombia

ASIA AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP RUSSIA 2018

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Uruguay	3	3	0	0	5	0	5	9
Russia	3	2	0	1	8	4	4	6
Saudi Arabia	3	1	0	2	2	7	-5	3
Egypt	3	0	0	3	2	6	-4	0

Russia 5 (Yury Gazinsky 12, Denis Cheryshev 43, 90+1, Artyom Dzyuba 71, Aleksandr 90+4) Saudi Arabia 0  
Uruguay 1 (Luis Suarez 23) Saudi Arabia 0  
Saudi Arabia 2 (Salman Al Faraj 45+6, Salem Al Dawsari 90+5) Egypt 1 (Mohamed Salah 22)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
France	3	2	1	0	3	1	2	7
Denmark	3	1	2	0	2	1	1	5
Peru	3	1	0	2	2	2	0	3
Australia	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3	1

France 2 (Antoine Griezmann 58 pen, Aziz Behich 81 OG)  
Australia 1 (Mile Jedinak 62 pen)  
Denmark 1 (Christian Eriksen 7) Australia 1 (Mile Jedinak 38 pen)  
Australia 0 Peru 2 (Andre Carrillo 18, Paolo Gierrero 50)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Colombia	3	2	0	1	5	2	3	6
Japan	3	1	1	1	4	4	0	4
Senegal	3	1	1	1	4	4	0	4
Poland	3	1	0	2	2	5	-3	3

Colombia 1 (Juan Quintero 39) Japan 2 (Shinji Kagawa 6 pen, Yuya Osako 73)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Spain	3	1	2	0	6	5	1	5
Portugal	3	1	2	0	5	4	1	5
IR Iran	3	1	1	1	2	2	0	4
Morocco	3	0	1	2	2	4	-2	1

Morocco 0 Iran 1 (Aziz Bouhaddouz 90+5)  
Iran 0 Spain 1 (Diego Costa 54)  
Iran 1 (Karim Ansarifard 90+3 pen) Portugal 1 (Ricardo Quaresma 45)

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Sweden	3	2	0	1	5	2	3	6
Mexico	3	2	0	1	3	4	-1	6
Korea Republic	3	1	0	2	3	3	0	3
Germany	3	1	0	2	2	4	-2	3

Sweden 1 (Andreas Granqvist 65 pen) Korea Republic 0  
Korea Republic 1 (Son Heung-min 90+3) Mexico 2 (Carlos Vela 26 pen, Javier Hernandez 66)  
Korea Republic 2 (Kim young-gwon 90+3, Son Heung-min 90+6) Germany 0

Round of 16

Belgium 3 (Jan Vertonghen 69, Marouane Fellaini 74, Nacer Chadli 90+4) Japan 2 (Genki Haraguchi 48, Takashi Inui 52)





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# THE JOURNEY

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THE RISE TO THE TOP HAS BEEN FAR FROM EASY FOR NEIL ETHERIDGE BUT THE PHILIPPINES AND CARDIFF CITY GOALKEEPER HAS NOW JOINED THE ELITE, AS HE EMBARKS ON HIS FIRST SEASON IN ENGLAND'S PREMIER LEAGUE AND PREPARES FOR THE 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.

**By:** Cedelf Tupas **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Getty Images/ Philippines Football Federation







Philippines international and Cardiff City goalkeeper Neil Etheridge may be basking in the limelight as the first Southeast Asian player to feature in the English Premier League, but make no mistake about it, his path to one of the world's most high-profile and lucrative leagues, much like his own country's rise in Asian football, has come with plenty of challenges.

The 28-year-old Etheridge is no stranger to adversity and his well-documented ascent to England's top flight is every bit remarkable as it was difficult.

As he looks forward to joining the Azkals at their first AFC Asian Cup appearance in the United Arab Emirates in January, the goalkeeper can turn to his rollercoaster journey as a source of inspiration in spearheading the country's bid to create another milestone in the competition, where they will be faced with a daunting group that includes Korea Republic, China, and Kyrgyz Republic.

"It's been an emotional journey with many highs and lows," said Etheridge during a break in the Philippines' first training camp under new coach Scott Cooper in Bahrain.

"I think I'm very fortunate to be playing in the Premier League, but not many players will

have the same story as mine or be as fortunate as me."

The goalkeeper, who earned his 60th cap for the Philippines in a 1-1 friendly against Bahrain, becomes emotional every time he recounts the stories of his struggles, particularly four years ago when he went half a season without a club and wasn't selected for

**"I THINK I'M VERY FORTUNATE TO BE PLAYING IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE, BUT NOT MANY PLAYERS WILL HAVE THE SAME STORY AS MINE OR BE AS FORTUNATE AS ME."**

the national team.

But Etheridge also knows that it's in those challenging times that his resolve was strengthened. Ultimately, he thrived and, after winning promotion with Cardiff earlier this year, he started his top-flight career in impressive form, saving penalty kicks in his first two matches – against AFC Bournemouth and Newcastle United.

There was a time when Etheridge actually had more appearances at international level than club competitions. Quick and agile for his size and strong in the air, Etheridge cut his teeth playing for the Azkals, travelling

halfway around the world to Southeast Asia to represent the country whenever he was called up.

Two years after making his debut against Brunei Darussalam in the AFC Challenge Cup preliminary round in 2008, Etheridge played a key role as the Philippines pulled off arguably the biggest upset in AFF Championship history when they stunned defending champions Vietnam at My Dinh Stadium in Hanoi.

That 2-0 victory, now known as the 'Miracle of Hanoi', bolstered the Azkals' stock back home, making them instant celebrities in a country where basketball, boxing, and billiards were the more popular sports. At the time, Etheridge had yet to even play for his club, Fulham, but those experiences playing in front of large crowds in Asia came in handy when he returned to England.

"When I started in 2008 with the Philippines, I was walking into the unknown," said Etheridge, who qualifies to play for the Southeast Asian nation because of his Filipino mother.

"It felt right and I've always gone with my gut. In 2010, we were able to create history for the country as the underdogs in the AFF Championship, getting into the semi-final and [it was] a fantastic step for football in the Philippines. It was great for every player

on that team to walk out with 100,000 people in the stadium in Indonesia."

The Azkals lost both legs of the semi-finals against the Indonesians, but they had laid down a marker and had the region taking notice.

Two more semi-final appearances, this time without Etheridge, who was focusing on his club career, in the next two tournaments underlined the national team's progress, as did a second-place finish in the final edition of the AFC Challenge Cup in the Maldives in 2014.

The Azkals' popularity then plateaued back in the Philippines, although they still claimed landmark victories against higher-ranked teams in the shape of Bahrain and DPR Korea during the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifiers where they eventually finished third behind Uzbekistan and the Koreans in their group.

"The success we had before meant the Philippines was able to attract players with Filipino lineage in top leagues from Europe," said Etheridge.

Players like Stephan Schrock, Jerry Lucena, Dennis Cagara, Roland Muller, Javier Patino, and Paul Mulders all joined the side after the historic run in 2010, adding more quality and experience to the squad.

With Etheridge, brothers Phil and James Younghusband and former captain Rob Gier in the squad, the Philippines had what looked like a golden generation of players at its disposal.

*Far Left*  
AFF Championship 2010

*Left*  
Walsall FC 2016

*Above*  
AFC Asian Cup UAE  
2019 qualifiers

**"WHEN I STARTED IN 2008 WITH THE PHILIPPINES, I WAS WALKING INTO THE UNKNOWN. IT FELT RIGHT AND I'VE ALWAYS GONE WITH MY GUT."**

But as the Azkals failed to advance to the semi-finals as hosts of the AFF Championship in 2016, age was slowly catching up on a talented crop of players.

The chance for redemption came in AFC Asian Cup qualifying. The wins against Bahrain and DPR Korea proved critical as the Philippines advanced to the next phase of the qualifying stage.

They then went unbeaten in a group that included Yemen, Tajikistan and Nepal. But the Filipinos' qualification to the continental competition was not assured until they overcame the Tajiks 2-1 thanks to goals from Kevin Ingreso and Phil Younghusband in a dramatic comeback in Manila.

"I have played for the national team for 10 years and really when we started this, our dream was to reach the Asian Cup," said an

emotional Etheridge after the match.

"It has taken us a long time, but we're here. Words can't describe how ecstatic everyone is. We really showed our character – that was the Azkals I knew and have known for a long time. Never giving up no matter what."

For a few months in 2014, Etheridge embodied that very same quality that he talked about on that historic night in March. While others may have turned their back on the sport altogether, Etheridge soldiered on, never losing the belief in his abilities. It helped that he had two great goalkeepers in Australian Mark Schwarzer and Swiss Pascal Zuberbühler as influential figures in his career while he was still at Fulham.

"They taught me what it takes to be a professional football player; people sometimes think it's all about just kicking a football and playing the game, but it's much more than that," noted Etheridge.

"Your nutrition, behavior, sacrifice. I was very fortunate I had Pascal, who played in the World Cup, Euros, played with big clubs and in the Champions League. Then I got Mark, who played more than 500 games in the Premier League and got far in the Asian Cup. I had great people around me and I wanted to learn."

The toughest stretch of Etheridge's career started when he was released by





Fulham shortly before he took the plane to the Maldives to join the Azkals at the AFC Challenge Cup, where he sustained an injury after the first match against Afghanistan.

He watched from the stands as his replacement Roland Muller put in a performance to remember, saving a couple of penalties as the Philippines reached the final only to fall short against Palestine.

"I think the turning point for me was when I was released by Fulham, not having a club for five months, making wrong decisions, turning down clubs that I shouldn't have turned down," Etheridge recalled.

"I was seeing the other side of football. I remember Roland Muller had a fantastic competition in the Maldives. Going back to the UK, I did not have a club, but I was thinking it was going to be alright. Months later, I didn't get called up for the national team.

"Teams like Leyton Orient and Charlton were offering me contracts, but I kept turning them down, I don't know why now, but I just did."

Not only was Etheridge failing in his quest to resuscitate his career, his finances were also dwindling.

"I bought a house and a car, not looking at the future, and when everything was taken away, I sold them, thinking it was going to be alright. It came to a point that it was almost half of the season and I couldn't find a club anywhere.

"I went on trial at Wolverhampton [Wanderers], who said no, while Exeter said they had no budget. I was in a desperate place. My confidence had clearly been knocked, [and I was] heading into a somewhat football depression. I knew I could go to the Philippines and play in the Philippines but I knew deep down, I had so much more to give."

After a two-month loan deal with Oldham

*Left* Cardiff City 2018 *Above*  
AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 qualifiers

**"GOING BACK TO THE UK, I DID NOT HAVE A CLUB, BUT I WAS THINKING IT WAS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT. MONTHS LATER, I DIDN'T GET CALLED UP FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM."**

Athletic, Etheridge signed for Charlton Athletic for the last three months of the 2014-15 season.

"I remember going up to Oldham and I didn't enjoy playing there. I slept on a friend's sofa and I was practically living out of a suitcase."

Etheridge's next stop was with League One side Walsall, whose goalkeeping coach Neil Cutler was impressed with the Filipino international's exploits with the national team.

"He saw me with the Azkals and in my few short loan spells," said Etheridge. "People were always telling me I had to go out on loan, I had to get regular football, but I think I was proof that it always doesn't have to happen that way."

It was at Walsall where Etheridge's career flourished as he was a key figure for the club as they grabbed a play-off spot for promotion in his first season. Cardiff came seeking his services by the time his two-year deal with Walsall ended in 2017, with head coach Neil Warnock snapping him up at the start of the season.

"I was pretty nervous at the start at Cardiff but getting the Number 1 shirt at the start of the season admittedly helped in the first six months when I was just learning the play in the Championship," he admitted.

But a bad run of form midway through the season prompted Warnock to relegate

Etheridge to the bench.

"We lost three on the bounce during the Christmas period and I remember on New Year's Day being told I wasn't going to start. It was another learning curve. But the manager knew what he was doing and he created that hunger and got that back in me. I really felt I excelled in the second half of the season."

With 19 clean sheets in all competitions and promotion to the Premier League as the second-placed team in the Championship, Etheridge left little doubt who was first choice for Cardiff.

"Emotions were running high for me when we qualified for the Asian Cup after playing so many games for the Philippines in the last 10 years," he said. "Obviously making it to the Premier League was also a priority for me."

While Cardiff have struggled for points in the top flight, Etheridge has grabbed headlines with his penalty saves. But he insists he'd rather focus on his all-around performance.

"It's going to be a long season, a mental battle. I just need to get my balance right on and off the field and being part of the Azkals, it is also refreshing," he added.

"Any group in the Asian Cup will be tough. We are seeded fourth in the group so the expectation is for us to be knocked out, but after speaking to the new coach, we are not there to be walked over, but put in performances. We've got a lot of Filipinos supporting us."

Korea Republic, conquerors of Germany at the FIFA World Cup in Russia, will be the Philippines' first opponents on January 7. It's a daunting task for the newcomers, but one Etheridge is ready to face head on.

"We are there to compete and hopefully prove some people wrong."



# THE FINAL HURRAH

WITH FIVE CONTINENTAL TITLES BEFORE ARRIVING AT AL ITTIHAD IN 2005, AHMED AL DOKHI WAS ALREADY AMONG THE MOST DECORATED PLAYERS IN ASIA. THE DEFENDER WENT ON TO BE PART OF AN AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE-WINNING TEAM THAT REMAIN THE ONLY SIDE TO DEFEND THEIR TITLE.

Interview by: Khalid Ghadin Written by: Wael Jabir Photos: Lagardère Sports

Only one side have succeeded in defending the AFC Champions League title since its inception in 2002-03, the all-conquering Al Ittihad team that were crowned continental kings in 2004 and 2005. Right-back Ahmed Al Dokhi, who scored in the 2005 final, remembers a historic campaign for the Saudi Arabian team. The ascension of Mansour Al Balawi to chairman at Al Ittihad in 2003 signalled a new dawn for the Jeddah-based club.

Already six-time Saudi champions and one of the country's most popular sides, the new boss was determined to take his beloved team to greater heights.

Within the first 12 months of Al Balawi's reign, Al Ittihad had become only the second Saudi side – after Al Hilal – to be crowned champions of Asia's top club competition. The Tigers recovered from a 3-1 home reversal in the first leg of the final to thump Korea Republic's Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma 5-0 in the return fixture and lift the 2004 AFC Champions League trophy.

Not content with one continental triumph, Al Balawi went on and recruited legendary







manager Anghel Iordanescu. The Romanian had won the European Cup as a player with Steaua Bucharest and took them to the final as a coach, before entering the world of Asian football and guiding Al Hilal to the 1999-2000 Asian Club Championship title.

Iordanescu's mandate was to deliver a second Asian title, and his first major signing was one of his former charges, Ahmed Al Dokhi. The defender was already one of the most decorated players in Asian football, having won five continental titles in his decade at Al Hilal – two Asian Cup Winners' Cups and two Asian Super Cups, in addition to that 1999-2000 Asian Club Championship title won under the Romanian coach's guidance.

"Iordanescu was a top coach," enthused Al Dokhi 13 years on from completing a controversial transfer that had the whole country talking after he turned down a contract renewal offer from Al Hilal to join arch-rivals Al Ittihad.

"I had played under Iordanescu at Al Hilal, so I knew how much he relished a challenge. Success followed him wherever he went.

"It was a beautiful journey arriving at Al Ittihad in 2005. A great culmination for a very successful time of my life, especially in Asian competitions. I won five Asian titles, and each one has a special place in my heart."

As reigning champions, Al Ittihad received a bye through to the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League's 2005 edition, starting the campaign 5,000 miles away from home in Jinan, China. Skipper Mohammed Noor put the Saudis in front but Shandong Luneng equalised a few minutes later, leaving all options open for the return leg in Jeddah a week later.

Al Ittihad's resolve was to be tested at home when they went behind after just 16 minutes, but a stellar display of attacking football saw Al Dokhi and his teammates storm to a 7-2 victory by the final whistle.

Next up was a clash against Busan I'Park for a place in the final. Just like Shandong Luneng before them, the Korean side had won every one of their matches in the competition prior to facing Al Ittihad. And just like Shandong, they were comprehensively beaten by the Tigers.

This time, Al Ittihad did not wait until the second leg, sweeping Busan aside 5-0 in Korea Republic, with Al Dokhi setting up a goal. Two weeks later, they confirmed their place in the final with a 2-0 win in Jeddah. Al Dokhi was again on creative duty, supplying the cross for the first of Mohammed Kallon's two goals.

"We played some of the best attacking football under Iordanescu. He was always

eager to attack, which meant we were always capable of scoring almost at will. But he didn't ignore the defensive side of the game, on the contrary, he was very strict and demanding on that front. We did very well defensively too back then."

On the other side of the draw, 2002-03 champions Al Ain had progressed to the final, eliminating PAS Tehran in the quarter-finals and then Shenzhen Jianlobao in the last four.

Those results meant the winners of the first and second editions of the AFC Champions League were to go head-to-head in the final.

"The 2005 final was the most special memory for me. I had won the Asian Club Championship and other continental titles, but this time it was extra special because the winner would go to the FIFA Club World Cup. It was a dream for many players to qualify to the Club World Cup.

"We went into the final as reigning champions and on the back of some really impressive results, so it would have been easy to get over-confident. But we were an experienced group of players, so we knew we had to avoid complacency and stay focused over 180 minutes to win the title."

Having scored twice in the quarter-finals, Manaf Abushgeer was first to threaten when

Al Ittihad took on their hosts at Tahnoun bin Mohammed Stadium, the winger rattling the crossbar with a powerful left-footed effort.

But it was Al Ain who took the lead when Ali Msarri poked home six minutes after the interval, before Kallon equalised in the final five minutes from a penalty. With honours even, the two sides would reconvene in Jeddah two weeks later.

Kallon set the tone for what was to come at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium, finding the back of the net from a free-kick two minutes into the second leg.

Noor headed home Al Ittihad's second from a free-kick by Brazilian playmaker Tchecho to take the hosts into the break with a comfortable 2-0 lead.

Al Ain reduced the deficit from the spot ten minutes after the restart, but Al Ittihad responded instantly through Cameroonian striker Joseph Desire Job who headed the third from yet another Tchecho free-kick.

Al Dokhi was then denied an assist when his pinpoint cross was headed onto the woodwork by Job. The defender was to have the final say however, when, after making a jinking run into Al Ain's penalty box, he received Noor's perfectly weighted pass and expertly fired home from a narrow angle. Al Dokhi's goal – and Al Ittihad's fourth – ensured the tie was comfortably won despite

*Al  
2005 AFC Champions League*

Al Ain adding a second late on.

"As a full-back, my focus was always on defending and supplying crosses to set up scoring opportunities, and I rarely got on the scoresheet," admitted Al Dokhi.

"So, I was fortunate enough to score in the 2005 final. It was an important goal, because it allowed us to finally breathe and feel like Asian champions once again. I will always cherish the memory of scoring that goal."

Asian champions they were indeed, for the second time in a row. An achievement that stands unmatched to this day.

"Playing in and winning in continental competitions is a completely different experience to playing domestically. When you are in the AFC Champions League, everyone has got their eyes on you. You face the top teams in Asia, and every game is a final. All this made winning so many Asian titles very special for me.

"The 2005 AFC Champions League victory was my final taste of top honours in Asian football. I was on the verge of turning 30 and had experienced so much, so it was nice to end on a high and play in the Club World Cup."

Al Dokhi and his teammates would

go on to represent the Asian Football Confederation at the 2005 FIFA Club World Cup held in Japan that winter. Al Ittihad became the first Asian side to finish in the top four of the competition after they beat Egypt's Al Ahly then lost narrowly to a Sao Paulo side featuring the likes of Rogerio Ceni, Cicinho and Denilson to settle for fourth place.

The defender stayed in Jeddah for three more years, leaving Al Ittihad in 2008 to spend a season on loan at Qatar SC, before returning to Saudi Arabia to end his career at Al Nassr in 2011. He is one of the few players to have represented the trio of Al Hilal, Al Ittihad and Al Nassr.

Al Dokhi remains one of Saudi Arabia's most capped players. He travelled to three FIFA World Cups and finished runners-up at the 2000 AFC Asian Cup. Looking ahead, he has words of advice for the current generation as they prepare for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

"Everyone needs to live up to the responsibility of representing the kingdom if we are to be successful in the AFC Asian Cup again. I hope we can end the wait for the continental title and I strongly believe we have talented players who are more than capable of making it happen."



# THE BOY FROM BHUTAN

RANKED AMONG THE LOWEST NATIONAL TEAMS IN ASIA, BHUTAN RARELY GRAB THE FOOTBALL HEADLINES, BUT IN CHENCHO GYELTSHEN THE COUNTRY HAS PRODUCED A REAL TALENT WHO IS BREAKING NEW GROUND IN SOUTH ASIA.

By: Peter Alsop Photo: JSW Bengaluru

Never before has a Bhutanese player garnered as much attention as Chencho Gyeltshen, the 22-year-old JSW Bengaluru forward who made his national team debut in his mid-teens and has been dubbed “the Ronaldo of Bhutan”.

While comparisons with Portugal’s all-conquering global superstar are undoubtedly fantastical, there can be no denying that Chencho generates real excitement in a Himalayan nation that is not known for its footballing exploits.

Indeed, having already had spells in Thailand and Bangladesh prior to joining Minerva Punjab in India’s I-League in mid-2017, the forward had gained a wealth of experience before the Bangalore club signed him ahead of the 2018-19 Indian Super League (ISL) season, when he became the first Bhutanese player to appear in the competition.

“I always feel proud to represent my country and I am working hard so that I can change Bhutanese football [for the better],” said Chencho.

“I want to encourage Bhutanese youngsters to play professional football and make a living out of it because a lot of them don’t believe it’s possible.

“And every time I represent my country at competition level, I also gain greater experience.”

The well-travelled Paro native made the move that would catapult him to the next level in his career by joining Minerva Punjab prior to the 2017-18 season.

“I opted to play in the I-League because I wanted to open myself up to the Indian Super League,” he revealed.

“The amount that they were willing to pay me was less than what I used to earn in Bangladesh, but it didn’t matter to me.

“Playing in the I-League has given me a different experience and I have been able

to learn lessons from each club that I have been at.”

Opening himself up to the ISL, as he puts it, was exactly what Chencho achieved in his first season in India as Minerva pulled off a major shock by being crowned champions.

With no major honours to their name, little was expected from Minerva, but the side from Chandigarh upset the traditional I-League giants – Mohun Bagan and East Bengal – to claim the title by three points.

And Chencho would grab his fair share of headlines in his first season in India, finishing joint third in the scoring charts with seven goals and recording seven assists, while he was also named the best forward of the I-League season.

“Minerva were one of the underdogs in the league last year and the team did a great job because we didn’t have any highly paid professionals,” reflected Chencho.

“It was all because of the hard work and dedication from each player on the team that we were able to overcome all the challenges we faced.”

After such a strong season it was always unlikely the minnows would be able to hold onto their man and so it proved as former I-League champions Bengaluru, who have begun their second campaign in the ISL, came calling.

It was not a difficult decision for the forward to make, with the Karnataka state club boasting a trio of India’s biggest stars in captain Sunil Chhetri, goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and forward Udanta Singh.

The club is also home to international players from far and wide, with Spain, Australia and Venezuela all represented, making Sree Kanteerava Stadium the perfect place to make the next step forward in his career.

“Bengaluru has been one of my favourite teams in the ISL, so getting the chance to play here is like a dream come true,” admitted Chencho.

“The team leader, Sunil, is so passionate

about the game and the infrastructure that is provided to us and that makes us work even harder to have a successful season.

“One of the main reasons I joined BFC was because of my supporters back home. I had other offers but Bengaluru are very popular in Bhutan and the fans have always wanted to see me play alongside Sunil.

“Playing alongside the captain is the biggest privilege of my life and as I play with him I’ll learn a lot. In fact, I’ve already learned so many new things from him, on and off the pitch, since the day I joined this club and just by spending time with him.”

Bengaluru, now coached by their former assistant Carles Cuadrat, will start the season among the favourites after winning the league in their maiden campaign before missing out on the title after a 3-2 defeat to Chennaiyin in the Indian Super League final.

With the fifth edition of the ISL now underway, some 25 countries will be represented in a league that has gone global with rapid effect. And for the first time, Bhutan will be on show.

“It means a lot to be the first Bhutanese player in the ISL,” he said.

“My expectations from this league would be to lift the trophy for BFC and have myself perform better than I did in the I-League.”

Before the big kick-off to the 2018-19 ISL season, Chencho was back on international duty, this time at the SAFF (South Asian Football Federation) Championship in Bangladesh.

Drawn alongside the hosts, Nepal and Pakistan, the tournament did not go to plan as the Bhutanese exited following defeats to all three, having also failed to register a goal.

Given his young age, Chencho has plenty time ahead of him as he tries to help steer the current generation to greater heights, and when asked what he would like to achieve in the future, he does not hide his ambition.

“To be a constant, dedicated player to my country and to lift the SAFF Championship trophy for Bhutan before I retire has always been my dream.”





## MAN IN THE HOT SEAT

AFTER AN IMPRESSIVE SHOWING AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP IN RUSSIA, JAPAN APPOINTED HAJIME MORIYASU AS HEAD COACH. HE PROMPTLY GUIDED THE EAST ASIANS TO SILVER AT THE ASIAN GAMES AND IS NOW LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP AND THE 2020 OLYMPIC GAMES.

By: Sean Carroll Photos: Getty Images/Lagardère Sports

In Hajime Moriyasu, the Japan Football Association (JFA) have made a shrewd appointment to lead the Samurai Blue into the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 and beyond.

Japan's new head coach is determined, open, engaging, and a widely respected figure in the domestic game. The 50-year-old also has a pragmatic, ruthless streak, however, which ensures that above all he is a winner.

After guiding Sanfrecce Hiroshima to three J.League titles in four years between 2012 and 2015 Moriyasu was chosen to lead Japan's U-23 side in their preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, before also being parachuted in as part of Akira Nishino's

coaching staff at the recent FIFA World Cup after the JFA changed head coach two months before the competition.

"The thing I felt the most strongly working with Nishino in Russia was the mentality and physical strength of the Japanese players," Moriyasu recounted at his unveiling at the end of July.

"There are still things we can learn from overseas, but it's important to build a team that can capitalise upon the strong points of Japanese players. What I want to do is create a team that has a sense of unity; that defends and attacks with togetherness. Nishino also spoke about this, and I agree that we still have to improve in terms of how we deal with opponents and also our adaptability.







“France played in just that manner on their way to winning the World Cup. They have a lot of talent and were able to express themselves well going forward, but we saw in the semi-final against the Belgium side that knocked us out, that after they took the lead they were able to defend solidly – not only by sitting back but also by breaking out on the attack as well. In that respect, I feel that by looking around the world we can learn about how to win.”

This measured way of thinking sums up the approach of a man who enjoyed a steady playing career in the J.League, spending over a decade marshalling the midfields of Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Kyoto Purple Sanga, and Vegalta Sendai, as well as being a favourite of Hans Ooft when the Dutchman was in charge of the national team, winning the AFC Asian Cup in 1992.

After hanging up his boots in 2003, Moriyasu moved immediately into coaching and spent several years earning his stripes on the staff at Sanfrecce and Albirex Niigata, and by assuming roles for the JFA, including as a coach at the 2006 AFC Youth Championship and the 2007 FIFA U-20 World Cup.

In 2012 he succeeded Mihailo Petrovic as Hiroshima manager, instantly fine-tuning a team where he had helped lay the foundations and turning the perennial also-rans into

champions at the first time of asking.

That success was rooted in a refinement of the balance between defence and attack, and while the side conceded 49 times in its 34 games on the way to a seventh-placed finish in Petrovic’s final season, they strode to their maiden first division title under Moriyasu by letting in just 34 goals.

The newly found defensive solidarity was not achieved at the expense of attacking verve though, as at the other end of the pitch Sanfrecce found the net 63 times – 11 more than they had done the previous year.

It was far from beginner’s luck, however, and over the next three years Moriyasu built on his early success to establish a compact and proactive Sanfrecce as the team to beat in Japan’s top flight – leading them to further league titles in 2013 and 2015, as well as forays into the AFC Champions League.

The best the Purple Archers managed in Asia’s premier competition was a Round of 16 spot in 2014, although on that occasion they were only eliminated on away goals by Australia’s Western Sydney Wanderers, who would go on to win the tournament by beating Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia.

Moriyasu and his charges experienced further international competition in 2012 and 2015, appearing as host representatives at the FIFA Club World Cup, finishing third in 2015

as they came from behind to down the AFC Champions League holders Guangzhou Evergrande 2-1 in the third-place play-off.

They had earlier very nearly progressed to the final, going toe-to-toe with Argentinian giants River Plate in the semi-final before being narrowly edged out 1-0.

Moriyasu was magnanimous in defeat after that loss, but still had a competitive glint in his eye as he spoke ruefully of “the difference in the footballing cultures” of Japan and Argentina, and his desire to narrow the gap produced by the length of the respective countries’ footballing histories.

That willingness to step into the breach was reinforced when he moved into the national team hot seat in July, and he made it clear that he won’t be risk averse as he prepares the country for the next steps in its evolution.

“What I do for the benefit of the development of Japanese football I want to try without having any fear of the results,” he declared.

“Of course I want to win every time, but when trying things out there is always the risk of pain or mistakes. I plan to take that on without wavering, and to stick with conviction to what I think is right – in a professional world that goes without saying.”

The size of Moriyasu’s task is certainly

daunting, and as well as preparing the full national team for next year’s AFC Asian Cup and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, he also remains in charge of the U-23 side upon which huge pressure will be exerted as hosts of the 2020 Olympics.

“I think it’s impossible to do both jobs on your own, but there are a lot of people working behind the scenes to support Japanese football and the national team,” he said.

“By making the most of that I’m sure we can turn that ‘impossible’ to ‘possible’, and that watching over both teams at the same time can lead to significant results.”

Indeed, Moriyasu has a reputation for being willing and able to delegate work efficiently amongst his coaches, and his approachability also earns him appreciation and respect from his players. Even so, no-one is ever left in any doubt that the final decision rests with the manager, and a steely resolve prevents anyone under his charge from attempting to take liberties.

There is an expectation in some quarters that Moriyasu could carry out sweeping changes as part of a generation shift necessitated, in part, by the retirement from the international scene of key players such as Keisuke Honda and Makoto Hasebe, but, here too, he has struck a balanced tone.

“With regards to player selection, the

*Top Left AFC U23 Championship China 2018*

*Bottom left, Left & Above Asian Games 2018*

‘generation change’ is not something that is rooted in words,” he said.

“In this world there is competition. It’s a world in which players with appeal, players who put in the work, and players who achieve results will be left standing. I want to build a new Japan national team that has a fusion between different ages.”

The AFC Asian Cup will be the first genuine test of Moriyasu’s new-look team, and he is under no illusions as to the significance of a tournament that Japan were eliminated from at the quarter-final stage in Australia in 2015.

“The Asian Cup is a hugely important competition for us to show the strength of Japanese football and also add to the players’ experience,” he said.

The first glimpse of ‘Moriyasu Japan’ was an impressive one, as the new man guided his team to a comprehensive 3-0 win over Costa Rica at the start of September.

With the likes of Maya Yoshida, Yuto Nagatomo and Shinji Kagawa given time to focus on their club duties in Europe, a side comprising domestic and hitherto fringe players put in a swashbuckling performance in Osaka, giving fans plenty to get excited about

and suggesting the team have a number of interesting options as they head into the new era.

“I want to play the kind of football where the players are able to make decisions in the moment to seize control of the flow games in order to win them,” Moriyasu had said at his unveiling, and that shone through in a game in which Shoya Nakajima was the standout performer at the heart of a positive and attacking display.

Fellow young forwards Takumi Minamino and Ritsu Doan – who was one of four players handed a debut by Moriyasu – also played with confidence and assuredness, and despite the new-look nature of the team there were plenty of exciting combinations in Japan’s play.

“Everyone has their individual desire to succeed, to appear in games – all kinds of individual concerns – but what I was really impressed by in Russia was the fact that there was also a strong sense of mutual respect, a bond that meant everyone wanted to achieve results for the team,” Moriyasu had said. “That is something I have to take great care of.”

Few doubt that he has what it takes to succeed on that front, and under him Japan look well placed to build upon their status as one of Asia’s heavyweights.



# WORLD AT HER FEET

AN EVENTFUL 2018 HAS SEEN CHINA'S WANG SHUANG FINISH THIRD AT THE AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP AND CLAIM SILVER AT THE ASIAN GAMES, BEFORE STARTING HER CAREER WITH PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN AHEAD OF NEXT YEAR'S FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP IN FRANCE.

Interview by: Nikki Guo    Written by: Peter Alsop    Photo: Lagardère Sports/Getty Images

It's fair to say that it's been a whirlwind six months for Wang Shuang, the China forward who helped the Steel Roses finish third at the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Jordan to secure a place at the FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019.

Then, after narrowly missing out on the gold medal following defeat to Japan in the Asian Games final, Wang headed to Europe to join French giants Paris Saint-Germain.

With a huge 12 months to come, the forward discusses her career to date and looks ahead to the future.

**How happy were you with China's performances at the Asian Cup and Asian Games?**

During the 2018 Asian Games, we played very well and stuck together as a team.

We were much more like a team compared to how we played at the Asian Cup in Jordan.

**You have played in the FIFA World Cup before – what are your memories of 2015 in Canada?**

The 2015 World Cup was my first ever experience at the World Cup, and I still remember how nervous I was and how my teammates helped me to get over those feelings.

I was also very excited, but looking back I

feel that I was not very mature in terms of my technical ability and skill.

**How did it feel to sign for Paris Saint-Germain and how have your first experiences of France been?**

I was very nervous but also excited when I signed the contract with PSG. I have been lucky enough to meet [Angel] Di Maria, Neymar and [Gianluigi] Buffon in

**What do you hope to achieve in your time in Paris and also in the future with China?**

My aim is always to help the team score goals and win matches.

As a striker, that is my job and I will continue to do that for my whole career.

**Who do you look up to in life and why?**

Sun Wen is my lifetime idol. She is a very kind person and she always gives the younger players advice and suggestions by using her own personal experiences.

She has experienced a lot in her career and life so she advises me on how to face my difficulties on and off the pitch.

**What's been the best moment of your career and why?**

I think the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia has been the best moment so far, and I will never forget that experience.

This is the first time I have got so close to the trophy but in the end, unfortunately, we lost it.

**Finally, you have been referred to as the Chinese Messi – what do you think of that nickname?**

[Laughs] People call me the Chinese Messi but I am a fan of Cristiano Ronaldo! I appreciate that people are giving such a big compliment by comparing me to Messi, but I am a long way behind him.

Ronaldo is more of an idol to me as he works so hard and sets such a good example of how to be a professional player.

person. It did not feel real!

I am very happy that I scored in my first match for the team, as I had only had three training sessions with them.

**What differences do you expect to find from China and the Chinese Super League?**

My life here is very different from when I was in China. Everything is different, and it's very professional here. But life is life and training is training.







## LOFTY AMBITIONS

WITH A GOLDEN GENERATION OF UNITED ARAB EMIRATES PLAYERS AT THEIR PEAK AHEAD OF THE AFC ASIAN CUP UAE 2019, HOPES OF SILVERWARE ARE HIGH, WHILE A STRONG FOCUS ON YOUTH AIMS TO PLACE THE GULF STATE AMONGST THE CONTINENTAL HEAVYWEIGHTS FOR YEARS TO COME.

By: Wael Jabir Photos: Getty Images/UAE Professional League Committee (PLC)/UAE FA/Jamal Al Hassani







*Below* UAE FA President Marwan bin Ghalita



*Above* Against Saudi Arabia in the 1996 AFC Asian Cup final

*Left* Against West Germany at the 1990 FIFA World Cup

*Below* 2009 FIFA U-20 World Cup



*Above* Former UAE U-20 coach Jamal Al Hassani

*Left* Against Australia at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup

With a native population of just over a million people, making up around 11 percent of the country's expat-dominated demographics, the United Arab Emirates' ambitions transcend its size.

Bronze medals at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and the 2018 Asian Games are the early fruits of aspirational plans that aim to establish the 2019 AFC Asian Cup hosts as genuine heavyweights of Asian football.

When the UAE made its AFC Asian Cup debut in 1980, the country had only existed for nine years. The seven emirates of the Gulf coast were unified under the United Arab Emirates name in 1971.

Influences from Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran shaped the early years of Emirati football, with Egyptian Mohammed Siddique becoming the first ever coach of the Whites, and Iran's 1976 AFC Asian Cup-

## 1990

UAE appear at their first FIFA World Cup

winning coach Heshmat Mohajerani taking over the reins in 1980, leading the country in their maiden continental campaign. The inexperienced side finished bottom of their

group, but it was the start of brighter days for UAE football.

Over the next two decades, the UAE national team went from strength to strength, earning their first ever AFC Asian Cup win against India in 1984 and reaching the 1990 FIFA World Cup ahead of the likes of Japan, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Their continental record kept improving with a fourth-place finish in 1992 which was then bettered by their best result ever in the competition – runners-up on home soil in 1996.

Then came the shock. What looked like a straightforward 2000 AFC Asian Cup qualifying group ended in disaster. The

## 1996

UAE host the AFC Asian Cup and reach the final

UAE were drawn alongside Sri Lanka, who had never qualified for the finals, India and Bangladesh, who had not qualified since 1984 and 1980 respectively, and Uzbekistan, who had only appeared in the 1996 edition.

The UAE played host to the group and after winning their first two games, locked horns with Uzbekistan in Al Ain. The 20,000 fans in attendance were reduced to complete silence as Maksim Shatskikh scored the Uzbeks' only goal of the match, taking his country into the AFC Asian Cup finals and consigning the UAE to miss out on the competition, just four



years after they had contested the final.

"The Shock of 2000" cast a dark shadow over the next few years of Emirati football. It was back to the drawing board as the remaining members of "Generation 90", the generation that delivered qualification to the 1990 FIFA World Cup and an AFC Asian Cup runners-up place six years later, hung up their boots.

"Generation 90 with Adnan Al Talyani and his teammates are in my eyes the finest group of players this country produced," says Jamal Al Hassani, the former UAE U-20 head coach who has dedicated his career to developing grassroots football in the country and dreams of building a future golden generation.

"Developing local capacity is key to the

progress of football anywhere in the world, and before we even think of youth development, we have to look at coaches – the more qualified and experienced coaches are, the more they can offer young players.

"I am optimistic about the future of Emirati

## 77

UAE's FIFA Ranking in August 2018

football. More and more former players are taking up coaching as a career and that's the start of a change. Another mentality shift that has taken place over the past few years is that parents are increasingly considering football as a valid career path for their kids."

Youth development is at the heart of the UAE Football Association's vision. The focus on bringing youngsters through the age groups produced the nation's best AFC Asian Cup result since 1996. A squad assembled by coach Mahdi Ali at U-18 level won the AFC U-19 Championship in 2008. Seven years later, eight members of that squad formed the core of the team that finished third at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

In between, that group of players, spearheaded by 2015 AFC Player of the Year Ahmed Khalil, reached the quarter-finals of the 2009 FIFA U-20 World Cup, won silver at the 2010 Asian Games and qualified for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

The 2018 FIFA World Cup proved a

bridge too far for the Whites, though, and Al Hassani believes this is what separates this generation from that of two decades ago.

"The current generation is a good collective of players, they play beautiful football. Third place in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup was a very good achievement, but the fact is Generation 90 reached the World Cup when Asia had just two seats. The current generation was unable to, even as five Asian teams made it to Russia 2018."

Comparisons aside, the successes of recent years provided a foundation for the UAE FA to build on as they look to compete for titles, starting with the very next one on home soil.

"We have huge ambitions, we want to





compete for honours in regional, continental and international tournaments,” says His Excellency Marwan bin Ghalita, President of the UAE FA.

“In Australia 2015, our target was to reach the top four and we succeeded in the face of strong competition all the way from the group stage, only losing the semi-final to the hosts and eventual champions Australia.

“Third place was a very good achievement

### 10 Million

UAE's Population

for this generation which had already done so well at U-21 and U-23 levels. Fans are now hungry for the 2019 title, especially given that we were so close at home in 1996, when we lost to Saudi Arabia on penalties.”

With AFC Asian Cup success in mind, the UAE FA appointed Alberto Zaccheroni as head coach. The Italian understands the competition well, having led Japan to the title in Qatar 2011. The experienced tactician has set out to implement his trademark 3-4-3 formation, hoping to create a more defensively sound unit.

His first test was the regional Gulf Cup in Kuwait, where his pragmatism was evident as the Whites finished runners-up without losing or even conceding a single goal all tournament. Only a missed spot kick by talisman Omar Abdulrahman in the penalty shootout against Oman in the final denied Zaccheroni's men silverware.

Abdulrahman, the jewel in the crown of the 2015 bronze medalists, followed in Khalil's

footsteps, becoming the second Emirati to win the AFC Player of the Year award, in 2016, when he took Al Ain to the final of the AFC Champions League, and was named the tournament's MVP.

In August, Abdulrahman completed a move to Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal. The transfer, although to a league of a somewhat similar stature to the UAE Pro League, is still a first for an Emirati player. Bin Ghalita counts seeing more UAE players make the move to other leagues amongst his FA's objectives.

“We want to encourage Emirati players to move abroad and experience playing in different leagues, which will develop the levels of our players in many aspects including the experience of a truly professional environment with different cultures and playing styles.

“We also aim to make our domestic competitions more exciting, competitive and followed by fans and media.”

Strengthening domestic competitions is an objective shared by His Excellency Abdulla Nasir Al Junaibi, Chairman of the Pro League Committee, a semi-independent body in charge of organising and promoting the UAE Pro League.

The PLC was set up in 2007 with the purpose of creating a fully professional football league in the UAE, and in the decade since has been successful in establishing the competition as one of the best in the continent. Emirati clubs have reached two AFC Champions League finals – Al Ahli in 2015 and Al Ain the following year – and the league has produced two AFC Player of the Year winners in Khalil and Abdulrahman.

“We continue to hold annual development workshops to improve our competitions and reach our target of implementing the highest quality standards in organising competitions,” said Al Junaibi.

“Last season, we launched a number of initiatives that covered areas like increasing actual playing time, mandating clubs to have their own football academies and establishing a new player registration system.”

### 2019

UAE host the AFC Asian Cup

The UAE FA and PLC's efforts in developing domestic competitions were rewarded with the AFC League Development Programme (LDP) Award in February.

Ahead of the 2018-19 season, the PLC looked to tap into the nation's large expat community as a change in regulations allowed expats to be eligible for domestic competitions outside the standard foreign player quota.

“This season, expats who are registered for the Under 21 League will be automatically eligible for the first team, offering coaches the opportunity to expand their squads with local, foreign and expat players.

“Clubs have also been required to register and field players born on or after 1997 in the league and cup competitions to boost focus on youth development within clubs and give youngsters the opportunity to experience first-team football for the benefit of the U-20 and U-23 national teams.”



Left Head coach Alberto Zaccheroni

Below UAE Pro League Committee Chairman Abdulla Nasir Al Junaibi

Bottom FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 qualifiers

Above 2015 AFC Player of the Year Ahmed Khalil

Right 2016 AFC Player of the Year Omar Abdulrahman



# Q&A



UAE Football Association  
President  
H.E Marwan bin Ghalita

After winning bronze at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and the 2018 Asian Games, what is next for UAE national teams?

Third place in 2015 was a very good achievement for this generation which had already done so well at U-21 and U-23 levels. The recent bronze medal at the 2018 Asian Games is our second achievement in the competition after winning silver in 2010. These results will reflect positively on our national teams, giving the players a huge confidence boost ahead of upcoming challenges, especially the 2019 AFC Asian Cup on home soil. Winning that title is the dream we will aspire to achieve.

We should also not forget the upcoming AFC U-19 Championship in Indonesia, where our objective will be to book one of the qualifying tickets for the FIFA U-20 World Cup.

What positives does the UAE FA hope to achieve by hosting the 2019 AFC Asian Cup?

The UAE always aims to deliver successful events to add to its world-class status as a host of sporting events. We have world-class infrastructure, stadiums, hotels and shopping malls; all that can make the AFC Asian Cup a success.

Expat communities from over 200 nationalities living peacefully in the UAE will ensure excellent attendance in the 51 matches taking place across four cities.

What are the biggest challenges facing UAE football?

The main challenges we face are developing the administration at the UAE FA and boosting the expertise of our staff in various areas. Expanding the number of registered players across the UAE and encouraging Emirati players to move abroad are key challenges too. A big challenge we have is unifying the systems and playing style in UAE football academies. At this critical stage of a player's development, we want to develop our own style which is followed in all our national teams.





# Time Ticking Down For 2019 Kick-Off

SEPTEMBER’S ROUND OF FRIENDLY FIXTURES SAW TEAMS START THEIR PREPARATION FOR THE AFC ASIAN CUP UAE 2019, WHILE SEVERAL NEW COACHES BEGAN TO GET INTO THEIR STRIDES AHEAD OF JANUARY’S CONTINENTAL SHOWPIECE.



While the 100-day countdown to the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 at the end of September marked the start of the run-in to January’s extravaganza, the 24 teams who will compete to be crowned continental kings had already started their preparations with a series of key friendlies earlier in the month.

Hosts United Arab Emirates had a mixed set of results in their training camp in Girona, Spain. A 2-0 defeat to Trinidad and Tobago extended a winless run to five matches, although the 12-day camp did end on a positive note with a 3-0 win against Laos.

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni has a tough task to replicate the impressive third place finish at Australia 2015 under predecessor Mahdi Ali, but the former Japan manager believed there were positives to take from the time in Spain.

“The work of the coach is to prepare and equip the technical issues to suit the players’ abilities, so that the team performs as best it can on the pitch,” Zaccheroni told Emirati newspaper The National.

“The objective of these friendly matches is to develop the positives and address any negatives so we can avoid them in future. The players are implementing the vision of the technical staff on the field. The camp was successful and achieved the targets set.

“Our performance was distinctive, the lines converged and we applied high pressure, I am satisfied. We created many opportunities and didn’t convert them but we will work on that for coming matches.

“The next stage will see friendly matches with strong teams during team camps in October and November.”

Goalkeeper Ali Khaseif underlined the unity among the squad and their determination to make the most of the preparation period ahead of the kick-off of the Asian Cup in January.

“Coach Zaccheroni has a close relationship with the players and is keen to hear and understand our point of view,” added Khaseif.

“The atmosphere during the Girona camp was very positive. All players are highly responsible and understand the importance of this stage. They do their best to prepare for the Asian Cup in the most appropriate way.”

Zaccheroni’s men returned to Spain for another camp in October, this time in Barcelona, where they lined up friendlies against Honduras and Venezuela.

Meanwhile, defending champions Australia are adjusting to the sight of a new face in the dugout with Graham Arnold taking up the reins of the Socceroos following the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

The former Sydney FC boss completed his first training camp as the new national team coach in Turkey in early September and was pleased with the results.

“I think we all had a fantastic week, it was about connection to the players. It was obviously the first time I’ve been here with a lot of the players for a long time,” Arnold told Fox Sports.

“The whole purpose of the camp was not to have a game after a World Cup. The mental and physical stress of the World Cup takes it out of the players individually, and with playing for their clubs, too, it’s quite sufficient.

“So it was more about getting the players into camp, getting to know them, them getting to know us, introducing new staff to the players and vice versa, and overall I think we ticked every box.”

Australia had another training camp in Dubai from October 8-12 before a friendly in Kuwait. Arnold and his men will then return to home soil for friendlies against Korea Republic and Lebanon in November.

The Koreans, too, have a new man at the helm and Paulo Bento had a positive start to his spell with the Taeguk Warriors after beating Costa Rica 2-0 before an impressive draw with Chile.

“We still have time until October, and we’ll see a lot of matches before then,” Bento told Yonhap News. “We’ll select players when the matches are close. Of course, the players will need to have technique and have desire for the national team.”

“We can play that [attacking] kind of football because our players have that ability.”

Their upcoming fixtures see another clash with South American heavyweights when they face Uruguay on October 12 before a meeting with Panama three days later. November brings the match-up with Australia – a repeat of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup final – and then a friendly against Uzbekistan.

The Central Asians have also undergone their own coaching change, with former Egypt coach Hector Cuper taking the helm.

Initial results have been mixed with a 1-1 draw against Syria followed by a 1-0 defeat at home to Islamic Republic of Iran. A meeting with an in-form Qatar side comes on October 16 in what could be a good indicator of the White Wolves’ progress.

For Qatar, their potential to be tournament dark horses continues to grow after edging China 1-0 before a convincing 3-0 win over Palestine.

Japan, under new coach Hajime Moriyasu, are also looking in fine fettle in the early stages of the new regime following a comprehensive 3-0 win over Costa Rica.

“The players really fought well and ran hard. This team has only just started. I want to aim high and constantly think about how we can improve,” said Moriyasu.

Visits from Panama and Uruguay are set to further challenge the new-look Samurai Blue line-up in October.

Another participant in the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Saudi Arabia, have a distinctly South American flavour to their AFC Asian Cup preparation. A 2-2 draw with Bolivia in







September will be followed on October 13 with a massive test for the Green Falcons: the visit of powerhouse Brazil.

“The door is still open for all players,” said Saudi Arabia coach Juan Antonio Pizzi. “Those who perform well and show what they can do will always have a chance of being called up. It is all about putting together the right team and squad for the AFC Asian Cup.”

Rounding out Asia’s representatives at Russia 2018 is Iran, who were boosted not only by the 1-0 win over Uzbekistan but by the commitment of coach Carlos Queiroz to continue at the helm for the AFC Asian Cup 2019, after some speculation about him continuing in the role.

For Vietnam, as well as Thailand and the Philippines, the bulk of the preparation will be at the AFF Championship in November and December, although the Thais will also visit Hong Kong in October, while the Filipinos played out a 1-1 draw against Bahrain in September.

Marcello Lippi’s China, meanwhile, lost to Qatar and drew with Bahrain and are set to play India on October 13, while the Bahrainis

have dates with Syria and Palestine the same month.

“We have to learn from the experience and shortcomings from this trip to West Asia. What is important is that we put these lessons to good use,” said Lippi after the match against Bahrain.

“Selection to the national team is still open as there were some players who did not make this squad. We need to mobilise more players before the final [2019 AFC Asian Cup] squad is selected.”

Much of India’s September was taken up by the SAFF Championship in Bangladesh, while fellow their qualifiers from Group A, Kyrgyz Republic, had arguably the most impressive results in September’s friendlies.

A draw with Palestine was followed up by a stunning win over Syria, a team 20 places above them in the FIFA rankings. The results also saw the Central Asians extend their unbeaten record at home to two years.

“Every game is important, we had two matches this week and [Syria] are a high quality team,” said coach Aleksandr Krestinin, after the victory over Syria.

“Achieving such good results in such games gives the players confidence, and this is the level of opponents we have to play against, because in the final stages of the Asian Cup it’s not going to be easy.”

Jordan, Oman and Lebanon all faced off against one another in September. The Omanis shared goalless draw with both, while Lebanon defeated Jordan 1-0 in Amman.

The final friendly action involving an AFC Asian Cup 2019 team in September saw 2007 winners Iraq share an exciting 2-2 draw with Kuwait at Ali Sabah Al Salem Stadium in Al Farwaniyah, Kuwait.

As well as further pre-competition preparation to come in October, the trophy tour is set to begin in China before heading around some of Asia’s major cities including destinations in Korea Republic, Australia and Japan amongst others, before finally arriving in the UAE in December.

The opening match of the tournament between the hosts and Bahrain takes place on January 5 at Abu Dhabi’s Zayed Sports City Stadium.

AFC ASIAN CUP UAE 2019 - FIXTURES

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F
UAE Thailand India Bahrain	Australia Syria Palestine Jordan	Korea Republic China Kyrgyz Republic Philippines	IR Iran Iraq Vietnam Yemen	Saudi Arabia Qatar Lebanon DPR Korea	Japan Uzbekistan Oman Turkmenistan
05/01/19 UAE v Bahrain <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 06/01/19 Thailand v India <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 10/01/19 Bahrain v Thailand <i>(Dubai)</i> India v UAE <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 14/01/19 UAE v Thailand <i>(Al Ain)</i> India v Bahrain <i>(Sharjah)</i>	06/01/19 Australia v Jordan <i>(Al Ain)</i> Syria v Palestine <i>(Sharjah)</i> 10/01/19 Jordan v Syria <i>(Al Ain)</i> 11/01/19 Palestine v Australia <i>(Dubai)</i> 15/01/19 Australia v Syria <i>(Al Ain)</i> Palestine v Jordan <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i>	07/01/19 China v Kyrgyz Republic <i>(Al Ain)</i> Korea Republic v Philippines <i>(Dubai)</i> 11/01/19 Philippines v China <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Kyrgyz Republic v Korea Republic <i>(Al Ain)</i> 16/01/19 Korea Republic v China <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Kyrgyz Republic v Philippines <i>(Dubai)</i>	07/01/19 Iran v Yemen <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 08/01/19 Iraq v Vietnam <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 12/01/19 Vietnam v Iran <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Yemen v Iraq <i>(Sharjah)</i> 16/01/19 Vietnam v Yemen <i>(Al Ain)</i> Iran v Iraq <i>(Dubai)</i>	08/01/19 Saudi Arabia v DPR Korea <i>(Dubai)</i> 09/01/19 Qatar v Lebanon <i>(Al Ain)</i> 12/01/19 Lebanon v Saudi Arabia <i>(Dubai)</i> 13/01/19 DPR Korea v Qatar <i>(Al Ain)</i> 17/01/19 Saudi Arabia v Qatar <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Lebanon v DPR Korea <i>(Sharjah)</i>	09/01/19 Japan v Turkmenistan <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Uzbekistan v Oman <i>(Sharjah)</i> 13/01/19 Oman v Japan <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Turkmenistan v Uzbekistan <i>(Dubai)</i> 17/01/19 Oman v Turkmenistan <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> Japan v Uzbekistan <i>(Al Ain)</i>
Round of 16			Quarter-finals		Semi-finals
20/01/19 Winner Group B v 3rd Group A/C/D <i>(Dubai)</i> Runner-up Group A v Runner-up Group C <i>(Al Ain)</i> Winner Group D v 3rd Group B/E/F <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 21/01/19 Winner Group F v Runner-up Group E <i>(Sharjah)</i> Runner-up Group B v Runner-up Group F <i>(Al Ain)</i>		Winner Group A v 3rd Group C/D/E <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i> 22/01/19 Winner Group C v 3rd Group A/B/F <i>(Dubai)</i> Winner Group E v Runner-up Group D <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i>		Winner Match 46 v Winner Match 45 <i>(Al Ain)</i> 29/01/19 Winner Match 47 v Winner Match 48 <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i>	
				Final	
				01/02/19 Winner Match 49 v Winner Match 50 <i>(Abu Dhabi)</i>	





# Semi-Final Line-Up Confirmed

Qatar's Al Sadd, Persepolis of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan's Kashima Antlers and Suwon Samsung Bluewings of Korea Republic have all advanced to the AFC Champions League semi-finals after coming through their quarter-final ties in mid-September.

Al Sadd, the last team from West Asia to lift the title when they were crowned champions in 2011 and the only former winners remaining, saw off Iran's Esteghlal 5-3 on aggregate with the competition's top scorer Baghdad Bounedjah and Akram Afif starring in both legs.

Boualem Khoukhi's own goal gave Esteghlal an early lead in the first leg in Tehran, but Afif levelled proceedings on the hour and Bounedjah added a brace to stun Azadi Stadium as Al Sadd returned home firmly in the driving seat.

Afif rifled in the opener in the reverse fixture but Esteghlal made a fight of it and levelled through Rouhollah Bagheri before Morteza Tabrizi gave them the lead. But after Rouzbeh Cheshmi had been sent off for the visitors, Bounedjah secured a 2-2 draw with his 12th goal of the tournament from a late penalty.

"The game in Tehran was easier than this one," said Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira, whose team will play another Iranian side, Persepolis, in the last four.

"Esteghlal came at us at full strength and they played with the aim of making up the two-goal deficit from the first leg.

"There's no doubt the game against Persepolis will be tough. We played them in the group stage but this time it will be completely different. We need to be at our best when we play them, and that match is going to be like a final."

Persepolis produced a stunning final 45 minutes in their quarter-final clash with Qatar's Al Duhail, who won their ninth successive match on the continent after Almoez Ali scored the only goal of the game in the first leg in Doha.

Al Duhail appeared to be heading for the semi-finals after Karim Boudiaf gave them a first-half lead at Azadi Stadium three weeks later to leave the Iranian team needing three, but the Qatari side's run would come to a dramatic end.

Jalal Hosseini levelled for the hosts just before the hour and Sultan Al Brake's own goal was then followed by Godwin Mensha's winner as Persepolis advanced to their second successive semi-final.

"Persepolis are a team with a winning



mentality, and we channelled that out in the second half," said midfielder Bashar Resan.

"We were all determined to get back into it, worked really hard and took the chances that came our way."

In the East, Kashima secured their maiden appearance in the semi-finals and a clash with Suwon after a comprehensive 5-0 aggregate victory over China's Tianjin Quanjian.

Brazilian duo Leo Silva and Serginho scored second-half goals in the first leg as the J.League side defeated the debutants 2-0.

Any chances of a Tianjin comeback were dashed in the first 45 minutes of the reverse fixture as Serginho and Hiroki Abe put Kashima two goals up, before Shoma Doi rounded off the scoring midway through the second half.

"Tianjin came out really aggressively and I felt we were a little passive to begin with, but scoring the two goals in the first half was really big for us," said Kashima coach Go Oiwa.

"I'm absolutely delighted we have made it into the semi-finals; however, our aim is to win the title."

And finally, Suwon stunned two-time winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors in the final 15 minutes of the first leg as a Dejan

Damjanovic brace and a goal from Han Eui-kwon gave them a 3-0 victory in Jeonju.

But, incredibly, Jeonbuk came back into the tie in the return meeting as goals from Adriano, Choi Bo-kyung and Kim Shin-wook secured their own 3-0 win and, after Suwon 'keeper Shin Hwa-yong saved Adriano's stoppage-time penalty, the game would be decided from the spot.




Shin again proved the hero, saving from Kim and Lee Dong-gook, before Bosnian Elvis Saric struck home for Suwon to progress to their second AFC Champions League semi-final after also reaching the last four in 2011.

"I am Man-of-the-Match tonight, but we all fought together as a team and that's the reason we could reach the semi-finals," said Shin after his heroics.

Al Sadd take on Persepolis and Suwon face Kashima over two legs in October's semi-finals with the sides seeking a place in November's final.

The first leg of the final will be held in East Asia on November 3 with the second leg taking place in West Asia on November 10, when the 2018 AFC Champions League winners will be crowned.



QUARTER-FINALS			
<div><b>Esteghlal v Al Sadd</b> 27/08/18 Esteghlal 1 (Boualem Khoukhi 12 OG) Al Sadd 3 (Akram Afif 60, Baghdad Bounedjah 65, 74 pen) 12/09/18 Al Sadd 2 (Akram Afif 27, Baghdad Bounedjah 90+2 pen) Esteghlal 2 (Rouhollah Bagheri 32, Morteza Tabrizi 49)</div>	<div><b>Al Duhail v Persepolis</b> 28/08/18 Al Duhail 1 (Almoez Ali 15) Persepolis 0 17/09/18 Persepolis 3 (Jalal Hosseini 57, Sultan Al Brake 76 OG, Godwin Mensha 78) Al Duhail 1 (Karim Boudiaf 33)</div>	<div><b>Kashima Antlers v Tianjin Quanjian</b> 28/08/18 Kashima Antlers 2 (Leo Silva 60, Serginho 72) Tianjin Quanjian 0 18/09/18 Tianjin Quanjian 0 Kashima Antlers 3 (Serginho 13, Hiroki Abe 27, Shoma Doi 66)</div>	<div><b>Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors v Suwon Samsung Bluewings</b> 29/08/18 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 0 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 3 (Dejan Damjanovic 75, 82, Han Eui-kwon 86) 19/09/18 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 0 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 3 (Adriano 11, Choi Bo-kyung 51, Kim Shin-wook 71)</div>
<div><b>Al Sadd</b> win 5-3 on aggregate</div>	<div><b>Persepolis</b> win 3-2 on aggregate</div>	<div><b>Kashima Antlers</b> win 5-0 on aggregate</div>	<div><b>Suwon Samsung Bluewings</b> win 4-2 on penalties after 3-3 aggregate draw</div>





# Air Force Club To Face Altyn Asyr In Final

Defending champions Air Force Club will look to seal an unprecedented third successive AFC Cup title when they face Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr in the final in late October. The Iraqi side have won the tournament on the only two previous occasions they have entered it – in 2016 and 2017 – and secured yet another final appearance after seeing off Jordan's Al Jazeera 4-1 on aggregate in the West Asia Zonal final.

After a four-month break since the West Asia Zonal semi-finals, Air Force Club enjoyed a perfect return to continental action when 2016 AFC Cup top scorer Hammadi Ahmed scored the only goal of the game in the first leg in Amman to ensure they began the second leg in Iraq with a crucial advantage.

However, a crowd of just under 15,000 at the Karbala Sports City was forced to wait until early in the second half to see the hosts break the deadlock, with Ahmed again on the scoresheet.

The striker then all but ensured progression with another goal just before the hour before Mohammad Tannous pulled one back for the visitors. But Qasim Majid rounded off the scoring in the last minute for a 3-1 victory.

Having qualified for the knockout stages for the first time, Central Asia Zonal champions Altyn Asyr, meanwhile, ensured their dream lived on after coming through a tough two-legged Inter-Zone final with East Asia Zonal champions 4.25 SC of DPR Korea.

The tournament's top scorer An Il-bom netted the opener in the first leg in Pyongyang but Vayht Orazsahedov levelled proceedings soon after. Kim Yu-song put the hosts back in front but Selim Nurmyradov secured a 2-2 draw by equalising in the final 10 minutes.

With all to play for in Ashgabat, it was 4.25 who took the lead early on at Kopetdag Stadium when Han Song-hyok headed home to put the visitors in the driving seat.

But An then missed a second-half penalty before Orazsahedov netted a spot kick for the hosts as the eventual 3-3 aggregate draw saw Altyn Asyr advance to the final on away goals to become the first Turkmen side to qualify for the showpiece event.

Altyn Asyr had earlier progressed to the Inter-Zone final following victory over the 2016 runners-up and South Asia Zonal champions JSW Bengaluru of India in the Inter-Zone semi-final.



Orazsahedov, signed prior to the knockout rounds after a short stint in Azerbaijan, opened the scoring in the first leg in southern India before Altymyrat Annadurdyev and Orazsahedov's brace put the visitors three goals to the good.

Bengaluru pulled two back through Rahul Bheke and Erik Paartalu to give them hope ahead of the reverse fixture in the Turkmen capital, but second-half goals from Annadurdyev and Orazsahedov saw Altyn Asyr claim a 2-0 win on the day to advance 5-3 on aggregate.



There were few problems for 4.25 as they eased past Home United of Singapore in the other Inter-Zone semi-final.

AFC Cup semi-finalists in the inaugural edition in 2004, Home United defeated Ceres Negros of the Philippines 3-1 on aggregate in August to be crowned ASEAN Zonal champions and book a date with the Pyongyang club.

But 4.25 proved too strong as they ran out 2-0 winners in Singapore before Om Chol-song netted a hat-trick in a comprehensive 9-1 victory at Kim Il-sung Stadium as an 11-1 aggregate win set up the clash with Altyn Asyr.

The AFC Cup final will take place on October 27, with West Asia chosen as this year's dedicated host.

After defeating Bengaluru and Tajikistan's FC Istiklol in the previous two finals, Air Force Club will try to match Kuwait SC's record of three titles while also seeking to become the first side to win three in a row.

Altyn Asyr, meanwhile, are attempting to become only the second team from Central Asia – after Uzbekistan's Nasaf in 2011 – to lift the trophy and in doing so become the first side to stop the Iraqi team being crowned champions.

ASEAN Zonal Final			
	Ceres Negros	01/08/18 Ceres Negros 1 (Blake Powell 8 pen) Home United 1 (Isaka Cernak 23)	
Home United win 3-1 on aggregate			
	Home United	08/08/18 Home United 2 (Shakir Hamzah 62, Song Ui-young 74) Ceres Negros 0	
Inter-Zone Semi-Final			
	4.25 SC	21/08/18 Home United 0 4.25 SC 2 (Pak Myong-song 62, An Il-bom 81)	
	Home United	28/08/18 4.25 SC 9 (Om Chol-song 24, 40, 45+2, Rim Chol-min 30, An Il-bom 50 pen 65, Han Song-hyok 61, Son Phyong-il 79, Yun Il-gwang 84) Home United 1 (Song Ui-young 19)	
4.25 SC win 11-1 on aggregate			
	JSW Bengaluru	22/08/18 JSW Bengaluru 2 (Rahul Bheke 63, Erik Paartalu 88) Altyn Asyr 3 (Vayht Orazsahedov 11, 46, Altymyrat Annadurdyev 25)	
	Altyn Asyr	29/08/18 Altyn Asyr 2 (Altymyrat Annadurdyev 50, Vayht Orazsahedov 58) JSW Bengaluru 0	
Altyn Asyr win 5-2 on aggregate			
Inter-Zone Final			
	4.25 SC	17/09/18 4.25 SC 2 (An Il-bom 15, Kim Yu-song 32) Altyn Asyr 2 (Vayht Orazsahedov 20, Selim Nurmyradov 81)	
	Altyn Asyr	03/10/18 Altyn Asyr 1 (Vayht Orazsahedov 64 pen) 4.25 SC 1 (Han Song-hyok 7)	
Altyn Asyr win on away goals			
West Asia Zonal Final			
	Al Jazeera	18/09/18 Al Jazeera 0 Air Force Club 1 (Hammadi Ahmed 64)	
	Air Force Club	02/10/18 Air Force Club 3 (Hammadi Ahmed 48, 57, Qasim Majid 89) Al Jazeera 1 (Mohammad Tannous 86)	
Air Force Club win 4-1 on aggregate			







# Futsal Club Championship

## Joy For Mes Sungun

Mes Sungun Varzaghan posted a perfect six wins from six to win the AFC Futsal Club Championship Indonesia 2018 following a 4-2 victory over Vietnam's Thai Son Nam in August's final.

The Tabriz side became the fourth team from the Islamic Republic of Iran to lift the continental trophy after Iranian clubs were also crowned champions in the inaugural edition in 2010, as well as in 2012 and 2015.

Pham Duc Hoa gave the Vietnamese underdogs an early lead in the final in Yogyakarta but Hossein Tayebi levelled before Mes Sungun captain Farhad Fakhim put the Iranians 2-1 up.

Tran Van Vu restored parity as the interval approached but Fakhim's second and a late penalty from Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh saw Hamid Bigham Tabrizi's team run out 4-2 winners as the title returned to Iran for the first time in three years.

Making their maiden appearance in the competition, Mes Sungun swept everyone aside in Group D, scoring nine against Tajikistan's FC Sipar and Uzbekistan's AGMK FC, before defeating Lebanon's Bank of Beirut 3-1 to top the standings.

The Lebanese side also posted big wins over the Tajiks and the Uzbeks – with their Iranian hitman Mahdi Javid scoring a hat-trick in each game – to join Mes Sungun in the quarter-finals.

The AFC Futsal Club Championship was being held in Indonesia for the first time and hosts Vamos FC got the tournament off to a perfect start by seeing off Myanmar's Victoria University College 8-1 in Group A.

A point against China's Dalian Yuan Dynasty proved enough to progress to the knockout rounds behind 2016 winners Nagoya Oceans of Japan, who won all three of their group games as they began their bid to win an unprecedented fourth title in style.

Two-time semi-finalists Thai Son Nam started their campaign with a resounding 10-1 victory over Korea Republic's Jeonju MAG in Group B, but defeat to Iraq's Nafit Al Wasat meant qualification went down to the wire.

Vu Quoc Hung's last-minute goal against the United Arab Emirates' Al Dhafrah sealed a place in the quarter-finals at the death, but 2016 runners-up Nafit claimed top spot following two wins and a draw.

Defending champions Chonburi Bluewave had few problems in Group C, where they posted big wins over Australia's Vic Vipers, Kyrgyz Republic's FC Erem and Qatar's Al Saliya to progress as table-toppers.

The Thai team would be joined by FC Erem, who defeated Vic Vipers and Al Saliya either side of a loss to Chonburi to secure their place in the knockout rounds.

But the Kyrgyz side's run came to an end when they faced Mes Sungun in the quarter-finals as the Iranians' 8-3 win underlined their status as title contenders.

Big names would fall in the last eight,

though, as the holders went out following a classic encounter with Bank of Beirut.

Star pivot Suphawut Thueanklang scored four in a game that saw Chonburi recover from a 6-3 deficit, but, after the game ended 7-7 following extra-time, the Lebanese side advanced 3-2 on penalties.

Nagoya also fell in the quarter-finals as Ho Van Y's extra-time winner secured a 3-2 victory for Thai Son Nam in yet further evidence of the rise of Vietnamese futsal.

The hosts put up a valiant fight in their last-eight clash with Nafit as a last-minute Marvin Wossiry goal made it 4-4 to take the tie to extra-time.

But the Iraqi side prevailed, scoring three more to return to the semi-finals for the third time in four years.

There they would exit, though, as a brace from Hassanzadeh and a goal from Fakhim meant Mes Sungun's run continued into the final following a 3-2 victory.

A thrilling second semi-final saw Thai Son Nam come from two down to eventually defeat Bank of Beirut 6-5 after Duc Hoa scored the decisive goal in the 39th minute as they became the first Vietnamese side to advance to the final.

Bank of Beirut finished third after Javid netted a hat-trick in a 5-3 victory over Nafit in the third place play-off. The Iranian finished as the tournament's leading scorer with 12 goals, while he also scooped the Most Valuable Player award.

Group A									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Nagoya Oceans	3	3	0	0	14	1	13	9	
Vamos FC	3	1	1	1	11	8	3	4	
Dalian Yuan	3	1	1	1	7	11	-4	4	
Victoria	3	0	0	3	3	15	-12	0	

01/08/18  
Vamos FC 8 (Al Fajri Zikri 5, Dennis Bawana 7, Bagus Himawan 8, 37, Anzar, 10, Nandi Sumawijaya 15, Marvin Wossiry 31, Iqbal Aliefian 40) Victoria University 1 (Tun Kyaw 29)  
Nagoya Oceans 6 (Masaya Hashimoto 10, 22, Tomoki Yoshikawa 15, Luizinho 24, 33, Ryohei Ando 40) Dalian Yuan Dynasty 1 (Shen Siming 39 pen)  
03/08/18  
Dalian Yuan Dynasty 3 (Diogo 22, 32, Li Zhiheng 36) Vamos FC 3 (Marvin Wossiry 4, Dennis Bawana 38, Bagus Himawan 40)  
Victoria University 0 Nagoya Oceans 4 (Neto Hirata 13, Ryohei Ando 16, Luizinho 27, Ryosuke Nishitani 36)  
05/08/18  
Vamos FC 0 Nagoya Oceans 4 (Neto Hirata 8, 26, Luizinho 23, Masaya Hashimoto 32)  
Dalian Yuan Dynasty 3 (Wang Hongwei 10, Li Zhiheng 33, 38) Victoria University 2 (Aung Zin Oo 4, Min Soe 40)

Group B									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Nafit Al Wasat	3	2	1	0	11	5	6	7	
Thai Son Nam	3	2	0	1	17	8	9	6	
Al Dhafrah	3	1	1	1	13	7	6	4	
Jeonju MAG	3	0	0	3	4	25	-21	0	

01/08/18  
Thai Son Nam 10 (Nguyen Minh Tri 3, 26, Tobe 13, Pham Duc Hoa 22, Abdulrahman Al Tawail 25, 37, Vu Duc Tung 28, Tran Van Vu 29, Ngo Ngoc Son 34, Ton That Phi 39) Jeonju MAG 1 (Cho Byung-girl 23)  
Al Dhafrah 1 (Mohamed Fadaaq 24) Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Hassan Ali Jabar 33)  
03/08/18  
Nafit Al Wasat 4 (Farhad Tavakoli 25, 38, Waleed Khalid 31, Ghodrat Bahadori 32 pen) Thai Son Nam 3 (Tobe 2, Ton That Phi 36, Waleed Khalid 38 OG)  
Jeonju MAG 2 (Kim In-woo 2, Shin Jong-hoon 34) Al Dhafrah 9 (Mohamed Fadaaq 8, 9, 26, 33, Younis Al Hammadi 14, Vassoura 20, 40, Sabry Hezam 27, Hamdan Al Katheeri 38)  
05/08/18  
Thai Son Nam 4 (Nguyen Minh Tri 9, Chau Doan Phat 19, Nguyen Dac Huy 36, Vu Quoc Hung 40) Al Dhafrah 3 (Abdulkarim Jamil 31, Mohammed Obaid 33, Vassoura 37)  
Nafit Al Wasat 6 (Farhad Tavakoli 10, 40, Waleed Khalid 11, Mustafa Bachay 13, 33, Zaid Ali 37) Jeonju MAG 1 (Shin Jong-hoon 40)

Group C									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Chonburi	3	3	0	0	21	5	16	9	
FC Erem	3	2	0	1	9	8	1	6	
Al Saliya	3	1	0	2	7	13	-6	3	
Vic Vipers	3	0	0	3	6	17	-11	0	

02/08/18  
Chonburi Bluewave 9 (Kritsada Wongkaeo 1, 23, 29, Xapa 19, 23, Nattawut Madyalan 24, Sorasak Phoonjungreed 25, Jirawat Sornwichian 30, Suphawut Thueanklang 30) Vic Vipers 2 (Yazid Kamaruzuan 21, Victor Brauner 25)  
Al Saliya 1 (Mohamed Al Suhaigi 12) FC Erem 4 (Emil Kanetov 24, Iuldashbai Salimbaev 25, Akbar Kazemi 26, Maksat Alimov 26)  
04/08/18  
FC Erem 1 (Adilet Kultaev 28) Chonburi Bluewave 5 (Suphawut Thueanklang 3, 8, 23, Xapa 20, Kritsada Wongkaeo 24)  
Vic Vipers 2 (Shayan Alinejad 13, Jonathan Barrientos 38) Al Saliya 4 (Saad Al Mohammadi 8, Mohammad Safari Golabvand 17, Saad Al Shahwani 18, Murilo Silva 25)

06/08/18  
Chonburi Bluewave 7 (Jirawat Sornwichian 1, Xapa 11, Kritsada Wongkaeo 16, Nattawut Madyalan 29, Panat Kittipanuwong 31, 38, Sorasak Phoonjungreed 33) Al Saliya 2 (Nattawut Madyalan 21 OG, Hadi Al Braid 39)  
FC Erem 4 (Dilshat Kadyrov 2, Maksat Alimov 7, Iuldashbai Salimbaev 23, Pavel Taku 27) Vic Vipers 2 (Shayan Alinejad 26, Yazid Kamaruzuan 30)

Group D									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Mes Sungun	3	3	0	0	21	4	17	9	
Bank of Beirut	3	2	0	1	16	6	10	6	
Sipar Khujand	3	1	0	2	6	21	-15	3	
AGMK FC	3	0	0	3	3	15	-12	0	

02/08/18  
Mes Sungun 9 (Shukhrat Bibudov 5 OG, Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh 8, Saeid Taghizadeh 11, Touhid Lotfi 15, Farhad Fakhim 19, Morteza Ezzati 23, Hossein Tayebi 34, 35, 38) Sipar Khujand 2 (Rustam Hamidov 30, Sobirdzhon Gulyakov 40)  
Bank of Beirut 4 (Ahmad El Dine 8, Mahdi Javid 9, 22, 39) AGMK FC 1 (Shukhrat Tojiboev 28)  
04/08/18  
AGMK FC 1 (Akbar Usmonov 14) Mes Sungun 9 (Morteza Ezzati 5, Hossein Tayebi 9, 27, 40, Ali Ashgar Hassenzadeh 13, Saeid Taghizadeh 17, Farhad Fakhim 19, Abolghasem Orouji 30)  
Sipar Khujand 2 (Sherzod Jumaev 16, Umed Kuziev 23) Bank of Beirut 11 (Mahdi Javid 7, 12, 13, Ahmad El Dine 10, Mohamad Kobeissy 20, 32, Moustafa Serhan 21, Bello 24, Ali Tneich 36, Ali El Homs 40, Mehdi Koubeissi 40)  
06/08/18  
Mes Sungun 3 (Morteza Ezzati 9, 30, Farhad Fakhim 10) Bank of Beirut 1 (Mahdi Javid 31)  
AGMK FC 1 (Jamoliddin Sharipov 40) Sipar Khujand 2 (Iqbol Vositzoda 27, Umed Kuziev 29)

### Quarter-Finals

Chonburi Bluewave 7 (Suphawut Thueanklang 1, 21, 23, 41, Jirawat Sornwichian 14, 19, Peerapat Kaewwilai 17) Bank of Beirut 7 (Mouhammad Hammoud 5, 10, Mahdi Javid 7, Mohamad Kobeissy 8, 15, Ahmad El Dine 18, Bello 46)  
Bank of Beirut win 3-2 on penalties  
Mes Sungun 8 (Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh 1, Mohammad Reza Sangsefidi 3, Saeid Taghizadeh 5, 13, Abolghasem Orouji 8, Alireza Askari 12, 21, Maksat Alimov 37 OG) FC Erem 3 (Mohammad Reza Sangsefidi 2 OG, Ulanbek Uulu 33, Pavel Taku 33)  
Nagoya Oceans 2 (Ryohei Ando 6, Ryosuke Nishitani 20) Thai Son Nam 3 (Nguyen Minh Tri 18, 21, Ho Van y 44)  
Nafit Al Wasat 7 (Hassan Ali Jabar 1, 34, 41, Ghodrat Bahadori 8, 31, Farhad Tavakoli 44, 46)  
Vamos FC 4 (Marvin Wossiry 11, 40, Iqbal Aliefian 22, 29)

### Semi-Finals

10/05/18  
Nafit Al Wasat 2 (Salim Faisal 20, Ghodrat Bahadori 37) Mes Sungun 3 (Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh 16, 27, Farhad Fakhim 37)  
Thai Son Nam 6 (Vu Quoc Hung 19, 29, Vu Duc Tung 33, Nguyen Thanh Tin 33, 38, Pham Duc Hoa 39) Bank of Beirut 5 (Mouhammad Hammoud 3, 21, Karim Abou Zeid 15, 39, Mahdi Javid 40)

### Third-Place Play-off

12/08/18  
Bank of Beirut 5 (Mahdi Javid 6, 34, 35, Bello 11, Mohamad Kobeissy 18) Nafit Al Wasat 3 (Waleed Khalid 3, Hassan Ali Jabar 12, 22)

### Final

12/08/18  
Thai Son Nam 2 (Pham Duc Hoa 5, Tran Van Vu 18) Mes Sungun 4 (Hossein Tayebi 10, Farhad Fakhim 12, 23, Ali Ashgar Hassanzadeh 39 pen)







# Japan Win Third AFC U-16 Championship Title

Japan were crowned AFC U-16 Championship Malaysia 2018 winners after Jun Nishikawa's second-half goal was enough to see off Tajikistan 1-0 in the final at Kuala Lumpur's Bukit Jalil National Stadium in early October.

The victory saw Yoshiro Moriyama's side add to the titles they won in 1994 and 2006 to become the only nation to have been crowned continental champions at U-16 level on three occasions.

After a closely fought first half, Japan took the lead in the 63rd minute when substitute Keita Nakano centred for Nishikawa to finish from eight yards with the only goal of the game.

With the tournament also acting as the qualifying event for the next year's FIFA U-17 World Cup in Peru, the two finalists – along with semi-finalists Australia and Korea Republic – advanced to the global showpiece.

Japan and Tajikistan were both paired in Group A, and the East Asians came from a goal down to record a 5-2 win over Thailand in their opening fixture.

Little would have been expected from Tajikistan after they went down 6-2 to hosts Malaysia in their opening game, but the Central Asians responded by drawing 0-0 with Japan.

Japan then eased into the last eight with a 2-0 win over Malaysia, and they were joined by the Tajiks after Islom Zairov netted with six minutes to play to defeat Thailand 2-1.

The 2014 champions DPR Korea again

progressed to the knockout rounds after an opening-day draw with Jordan was followed by successive wins against Yemen and Oman to top Group B.

Oman would join the East Asians, with four points from two games against Yemen and Jordan enough for them to advance.

Group C went down to the wire with Indonesia, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran all battling it out for two qualification places.

Indonesia began their campaign with a superb 2-0 win over Iran, while India saw off Vietnam 1-0. The Matchday Two encounters between India and Iran and Indonesia and Vietnam ended in stalemates to leave an exciting final round of fixtures on the cards.

Iran did their bit by defeating Vietnam 5-0, but a goalless draw between Indonesia and India saw the pair advance.

In Group D, holders Iraq began with a 2-1 victory over debutants Afghanistan but defeats to Australia and Korea Republic meant they exited at the first hurdle.

Korea Republic claimed top spot after three wins from three, while the Australians ended in second place.

Japan had to work for their place in the semi-finals, with it taking a Shoji Toyama goal in the final 10 minutes to see off a spirited Oman performance in a 2-1 win.

And Tajikistan would also prolong their run in the competition, but only after a penalty shootout victory over DPR Korea following a 1-1 draw over 120 minutes of action.

Indonesia's excellent tournament came to an end when the Southeast Asians ran into Australia in the last eight, but it took three second-half goals from the Joeys to secure a hard-fought 3-2 win.

Korea Republic then completed the semi-final line-up when Jeong Sang-bin scored the only goal of the game against India.

Noah Botic's early penalty saw Australia take the lead against Japan in the first semi-final but a second-half brace from Toyama and a goal from Shunsuke Mito wrapped up a 3-1 win and a place in the final.

In the second semi-final, Ozodbek Panzhiev struck in the second minute to put the Tajiks one up against Korea Republic, but Yoon Suk-ju levelled as half-time approached.

With no further goals, Tajikistan's fate would once again be decided from the penalty spot and, after the first 12 penalties were all converted, goalkeeper Mukhriddin Khasanov saved from Son Ho-jun to allow Muhammadrasul Litfullaev to score the decisive kick and seal their spot in the showpiece event.

Japan eventually proved a bridge too far but the Central Asians will look back on an incredible tournament that offers great hope for the future.

The Most Valuable Player award went to match-winner Nishikawa, while Malaysia's Luqman Hakim Shamsudin picked up the top scorer accolade following his five goals, four of which were against the Tajiks.



Group A								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	3	2	1	0	7	2	5	7
Tajikistan	3	1	1	1	4	7	-3	4
Thailand	3	1	0	2	7	9	-2	3
Malaysia	3	1	0	2	8	8	0	3

20/09/18  
Malaysia 6 (Luqman Hakim Shamsudin 30, 42, 46, 66, Najmudin Akmal 33 pen, Alif Mutalib 76 pen)  
Tajikistan 2 (Sharifbek Rahmatov 72 pen, Islom Zairov 90+1)  
Japan 5 (Ryotaro Araki 6, 34, Kuraba Kondo 8, Riku Handa 42, Shoji Toyama 90+1)  
Thailand 2 (Waragon Thongbai 1, Suphanat Mueanta 15)  
23/09/18  
Thailand 4 (Suphanat Mueanta 3, 21, Waragon Thongbai 57, Apidet Jamngnam 85)  
Malaysia 2 (Luqman Hakim Shamsudin 12, Firdaus Kaironnism 48)  
Tajikistan 0  
Japan 0  
27/09/18  
Malaysia 0  
Japan 2 (Shoji Toyama 37, Hikaru Naruoka 90+3)  
Thailand 1 (Suphanat Mueanta 80)  
Tajikistan 2 (Ozodbek Panzhiev 38, Islom Zairov 84)

Group B								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
DPR Korea	3	2	1	0	6	3	3	7
Oman	3	1	1	1	5	5	0	4
Yemen	3	1	0	2	5	4	1	3
Jordan	3	0	2	1	5	9	-4	2

21/09/18  
Oman 2 (Qusai Al Jaradi 14, 35)  
Yemen 0  
DPR Korea 2 (Kim Kang-song 20, 44)  
Jordan 2 (Mohammad Semreen 31, Amer Jamous 75)  
24/09/18  
Jordan 2 (Reziq Banihani 49, Amer Jamous 75 pen)  
Oman 2 (Omar Al Salti 54, Nasser Al Naabi 88)  
Yemen 0  
DPR Korea 1 (Kim Won-il 45+2)  
27/09/18  
DPR Korea 3 (Pak Ryong-gown 4, Kim Kang-song 16, An Phyoung-il 45+1)  
Oman 1 (Qusai Al Jaradi 78 pen)  
Yemen 5 (Faisal Saif 14, 73 pen, Tamer Senan 16, Saad Al Qaaod 24, Mohammad Issa 25 OG)  
Jordan 1 (Reziq Banihani 75 pen)

Group C								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Indonesia	3	1	2	0	3	1	2	5
India	3	1	2	0	1	0	1	5
Iran	3	1	1	1	5	2	3	4
Vietnam	3	0	1	2	1	7	-6	1

21/09/18  
Iran 0  
Indonesia 2 (Amiruddin Bagus 4, 90+1)  
Vietnam 0  
India 1 (Vikram Singh 86 pen)

24/09/18  
India 0  
Iran 0  
Indonesia 1 (Sutan Zico 49)  
Vietnam 1 (Khuat Van Khang 30)  
27/09/18  
Iran 5 (Amirhossein Azizi 18, 36, Aria Barzegar 21, Amin Doustali 31, 64)  
Vietnam 0  
India 0  
Indonesia 0

Group D								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Korea Republic	3	3	0	0	12	0	12	9
Australia	3	2	0	1	6	4	2	6
Iraq	3	1	0	2	3	5	-2	3
Afghanistan	3	0	0	3	1	13	-12	0

22/09/18  
Iraq 2 (Hussein Sadeq 3, Abdulrazzaq Qasim 14 pen)  
Afghanistan 1 (Ali Zahidi 5)  
Korea Republic 3 (Choi Min-seo 43, 68, Hong Yun-sang 51)  
Australia 0  
25/09/18  
Australia 2 (Luke Duzel 67, Noah Botic 74)  
Iraq 1 (Abdulrazzaq Qasim 81 pen)  
Afghanistan 0  
Korea Republic 7 (Ahn Gi-hun 22, 35, Esmatullah Kazimi 45 OG, Paik Sang-hoon 46, Jeong Sang-bin 59, 63, Hong Yun-sang 67)  
28/09/18  
Iraq 0  
Korea Republic 2 (Moon Jun-ho 45, 48)  
Australia 4 (Joseph Roddy 8, 45+3, Noah Botic 26, 61)  
Afghanistan 0

## Quarter-Finals

30/09/18  
Japan 2 (Issa Al Naabi 14 OG, Shoji Toyama 81)  
Oman 1 (Tariq Al Mashary 22)  
DPR Korea 1 (Ri Hun 69)  
Tajikistan 1 (Rustam Soirov 14)

Tajikistan win 4-2 on pens

01/10/18  
Indonesia 2 (Sutan Zico 17, Rendy Juliansyah 89)  
Australia 3 (Daniel Walsh 51, Adam Leombruno 65, Noah Botic 74)  
Korea Republic 1 (Jeong Sang-bin 68)  
India 0

## Semi-Finals

04/10/18  
Japan 3 (Shoji Toyama 59, 69, Shunsuke Mito 78)  
Australia 1 (Noah Botic 8 pen)  
Tajikistan 1 (Ozodbek Panzhiev 2)  
Korea Republic 1 (Yoon Suk-ju 39)

Tajikistan win 7-6 on pens

## Final

07/10/18  
Japan 1 (Jun Nishikawa 63)  
Tajikistan 0





## Campaign Pays Tribute To Inspirational Women

Asia's most prestigious football tournament – the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 – has launched a new nationwide campaign aimed at inspiring women across the United Arab Emirates to fulfill their potential in the community. Whether through sport or local initiatives, women in the Emirates are making positive change and are increasingly regarded as role models for the future.

The campaign, which continues the theme of the AFC's highly-successful, 'It's My Game' movement, is the first of its kind in the West Zone and will feature stories of real women involved in sport and the community, from players to doctors, marketers to managers, referees, photographers, coaches and more.

AFC General Secretary, Dato' Windsor John said: "Women's football represents an essential pillar for the

AFC and is an important part of the future success of Asian football.

"As we have witnessed through the 'It's My Game' campaign, we will continue to invest in their development to fulfil our vision and mission in expanding the reach of the game and to empower communities of all nationalities, ages and backgrounds.

"There is no better platform to showcase and celebrate the inspiring role of women than through Asia's most prestigious and biggest-ever football tournament."

The campaign also aims to encourage conversations with the next generation on the prospects of pursuing a career in sport as well as leveraging on the power of sport to empower the community.



## Assistant Referees Attend Third Preparatory Course

Fifty-three referees attended the third preparatory stage of the AFC Additional Assistant Referee (AAR) system in Kuala Lumpur in early August.

Previously, the referees participated in two courses, conducted in Doha and Kuala Lumpur, in March and August 2017 respectively. The four-day course focused on reinforcing the concept, protocol and technique of the AAR system.

International Football Association Board Technical Director David Elleray presented the participants with a first-hand overview of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system experiences from the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. Elleray also briefed the referees on the latest amendments of the Laws of the Game.

The course format concentrated on practical sessions, simulating real-match scenarios with the objective of strengthening teamwork among the referees, assistant

referees and the additional assistant referees in terms of decision-making priority and communication.

The AAR system was first introduced in Asia in the 2017 AFC Champions League knockout stages, where the system proved its efficacy in enhancing the decision-making process, achieving a 13 percent improvement rate when assessing incidents in and around the penalty area.

It was then followed by the national team level at the AFC U23 Championship China 2018 in January. The AARs successfully cooperated with the referees on an accuracy

rate of 96 percent.

At the competition, a game-changing decision was made by the additional assistant referee in the semi-final match between Qatar and Vietnam. The AAR correctly identified that the ball had completely crossed the goal-line for Qatar's equalising goal.



## Inaugural MA Workshop Held In Manama

The inaugural AFC Member Associations' International Relations Officers' Workshop for the West, Central and South Zones was held in Manama at the end of July.

The two-day workshop was replicated for ASEAN and East Zones' officers at the AFC House in Malaysia on August 2-3.

The President of the Bahrain Football Association (BFA), HE Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, General Secretary Ebrahim Saad Al Buainain and head of the technical affairs, Aabed Al Ansari attended the opening ceremony.

The BFA President stressed that international relations has become an important focus, pointing out that the participants will benefit greatly through the exchange and acquisition of experience. He also lauded the efforts of the AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, praising the efforts of all officials and staff of the

AFC.

The officers from various MAs, whose main duties are to deal with the AFC and other international organisations, were brought together at this forum so that they could interact with the different AFC departments and its services to further strengthen engagement.

By the end of the workshop, the 35 participants in Manama had developed contacts and synergy amongst one another, and had full understanding of the AFC's structure after sitting through presentations from the AFC MA &

International Relations, Legal, Competitions, Technical, Referees and MA Development departments.

Eman Abu Jaber from the Palestine Football Association said: "Through this workshop, I have learnt a lot about the AFC and the functions of the different departments."



## Malaysian FA President Visits AFC House

Dato' Hamidin Mohd Amin, the newly elected President of the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), met with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) General Secretary Dato' Windsor John at the AFC House at the end of July to discuss football development in Malaysia.

Dato' Hamidin was accompanied by FAM Vice-President Dato' Sri Subahan Kamal and newly appointed FAM General Secretary Stuart Michael Ramalingam at the meeting, in which he outlined to Dato' Windsor John and AFC Directors the FAM's commitment to work closely with the AFC.

Dato' Windsor John told Dato' Hamidin: "We are happy to welcome the FAM delegation to AFC House, the home of Asian football."

"Not only because of the AFC being located in Malaysia, FAM is an important Member Association of the AFC and has been a member since 1954 and we look forward to working with FAM and assisting in the future development of the game in the country."

Dato' Windsor added that the AFC has been encouraged by the positivity and enthusiasm Malaysian football is witnessing after the election of Dato' Hamidin

at the helm of FAM.

The AFC General Secretary also debriefed the FAM delegation on several development initiatives that AFC is providing to its Member Associations to develop football in their countries.

The FAM President thanked the AFC for their support and added: "We are ready to take Malaysian football to the next level and for that we need active support of the AFC and I am sure the relationship between the AFC and FAM will further enhance in coming days."





## UAE 2019 Volunteering Programme Launches

The biggest team of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 was launched on August 31 in Dubai Mall with thousands of fans signing up as volunteers for the biggest-ever AFC Asian Cup in history.

With just over four months to Asia's most prestigious football tournament, 5,000 opportunities were launched across a number of exciting and critical roles, from liaising with team services and VIP hospitality across the competition, to media work and venue operations.

Speaking on the Volunteers programme, Asian Football Confederation (AFC) General Secretary, Dato' Windsor John said: "Volunteers are the heart and soul of every major sporting event. They are real heroes who work tirelessly behind the scenes, so our football stars can focus on producing their best on the pitch and



to ensure a memorable matchday experience for our passionate fans."

HE Mohammad Khalfan Al Romaithi Vice President of the Supreme Local Organising committee, emphasised the importance of launching the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 volunteering programme.

"The Volunteers Programme is one of the core foundations of our organisational operations throughout the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 tournament, in all its football matches across the country," he said.

"We look forward to welcoming more than 5,000 volunteers from all professional backgrounds, who will join forces to serve the purpose of this prestigious football tournament, and reflect peace and harmony between all races and cultures in the UAE."

## Workshop Aims To Strengthen Club Licensing Standards

A two-day AFC Club Licensing Workshop was held at the Asian Football Confederation House in late August, bringing together 39 club licensing managers across the region.

The workshop aimed to equip the participants with the tools to familiarise themselves with the regulations and promote good practices as well as to improve and enhance the quality of club licensing in Asia.

AFC Head of Club Licensing Mahajan Vasudevan Nair, who chaired the workshop, conveyed AFC general secretary Dato' Windsor John's message: "The AFC has made significant progress since piloting the AFC Champions League club licensing system in 2012. Just last year, we introduced club licensing for teams in the AFC Cup.

"I am pleased to note that 43 Member Associations

are actively engaged and benefiting from this game-changing regulation system. More MAs are recognising the enormous impact of club licensing."

Among the significant topics discussed were AFC and UEFA Club Licensing Quality Standards, Licensing Regulations and Best Practices.

Also present was Ales Zavrl, Head of Club Licensing at UEFA and member of the UEFA Club Licensing Committee elaborated on UEFA's Financial Fair Play

"Apart from having good communication in the club organisation, commitment plays a vital role in the development of a good club licensing system. It is also important for us to share best practices and this can raise the standard of club licensing in the Member Associations," said Zavrl.



## CFA-AFC Launch Social Responsibility Programme

The Chinese Football Association (CFA) in conjunction with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), recently brought together communities and corporations under the Chinese Football Association 'Dream China' Beijing Social Responsibility Programme.

The events, involving more than 80 children and 60 coaches, were held at the National Olympic Park in Beijing as the CFA implemented social development programmes through collaboration with local clubs, local and international NGOs and government agencies.

The activities included some of the legends of China PR football including Sun Wen, the former Women's captain, Shao Jiayi, Nan Fang and Liu Qingquan as well as CFA and AFC partners such as the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies.

The CFA kick-started the two-day programme with

the AFC Social Responsibility Seminar for Grassroots Coaches followed by the Social Responsibility Field Activities on the last day.

At the AFC Social Responsibility Seminar for Grassroots Coaches the Beijing FA Vice President, Wang Jiangtao, praised the AFC's continued efforts in organising important SR activities in Asia – and

particularly in China PR.

Maude Froberg, the communications manager of International Federation of Red Cross/Crescent Societies, said the work of the AFC and CFA was highly valuable and productive for

IFRC in delivering public awareness on first aid and other health and disaster-related matters.

The CFA donated equipment worth 50,000 RMB to the China Administration of Sports for People with Disabilities in Beijing while their SR partners contributed training kit and equipment for the participating children.



## Dubai Mall Hosts Week Long Football Festival

Hundreds of football enthusiasts kicked off celebrations for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 being entertained by football freestylers and taking part in a number of interactive football activities at Dubai Mall.

Adding to the excitement, the first 50 fans who visited the Interactive Roadshow scored an extra treat, receiving tickets for selected group stage matches during the competition.

The Interactive Roadshow, which will tour around the UAE in multiple venues across Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Al Ain in the build up to the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 tournament, gives visitors the chance to be part of the action in the months leading up to the highly anticipated tournament.

The Interactive Roadshow offers fans a chance to learn, play, show off their skills and engage with cutting-edge VR technology in three distinct zones of engagement: The Virtual Zone, The Skills Zone and The Victory Zone.

Throughout each of the Interactive Roadshow days, the Virtual Zone educates fans about the stars and history

of the AFC Asian Cup tournament, bringing visitors on a journey across the UAE host cities via VR headsets. The Skills Zone welcomes fans of all footballing abilities, letting them tackle a series of accelerating challenges in a fun football simulator.

The Victory Zone features multiple interactive games that allow visitors to channel their passion through augmented reality by running, cheering or acting as a spokesperson on behalf of their favorite team.





# Suwon World Cup Stadium

Suwon, Korea Republic

Opened in May 2001 ahead of the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Korea Republic and Japan, Suwon World Cup Stadium is located in the province of Gyeonggi-do and is around 30 kilometres from the capital, Seoul. The venue, which has a capacity of 43,959, is nicknamed 'Big Bird Stadium' because the design of its roof was inspired by the wings of

a bird in flight, while the pattern on the seating is inspired by Suwon's Hwaseong Fortress. Suwon World Cup Stadium was among the venues for the 2001 FIFA Confederations Cup, staging two group stage games as well as the semi-final between France and Brazil. A year later at the World Cup it hosted three more group stage games – most notably Brazil's 5-2 win over Costa Rica – and Spain's Round of 16 victory against the Republic of Ireland. The stadium is home to one of Korea

Republic's biggest and most successful football clubs, Suwon Samsung Bluewings, who have won four K League titles and twice lifted the now defunct Asian Club Championship. Suwon World Cup Stadium frequently hosts AFC Champions League games, with Suwon regular qualifiers for a tournament which replaced the Asian Club Championship. When the 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup was held in Korea Republic, the venue staged a number of games, including the final between England and Venezuela.



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**ON THE EDGE**  
of your seat

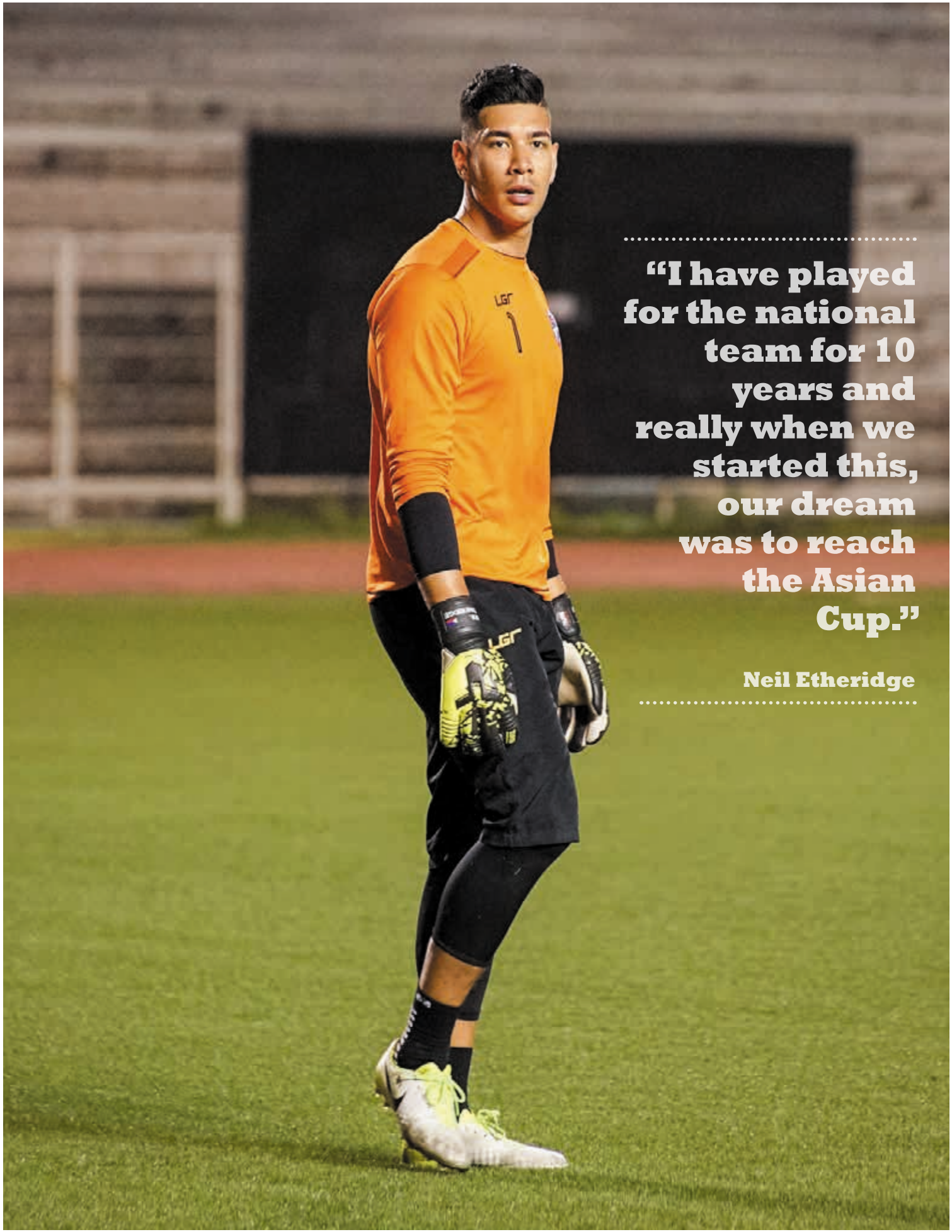


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Hello Tomorrow







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**“I have played  
for the national  
team for 10  
years and  
really when we  
started this,  
our dream  
was to reach  
the Asian  
Cup.”**

**Neil Etheridge**  
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